



MEMORANDUM

CC-26-132

Separating Downtown Lot Coverage from Large-Format Development

Item Type: Informational Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Lord, Homer City Council, and Homer Planning Commissioners
Date: June 22, 2026
From: Councilmember Davis

In discussing the Title 21 recommendations in our joint worksession on June 22, I recommend we consider the proposed 70% maximum lot coverage in Downtown Mixed Use separately from the proposed increase in the large-format development threshold.

Today's presentation groups these issues together under "Large Format Development." It notes that the Public Review Draft proposed increasing the large-format development threshold from 15,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet, while also establishing new building coverage maximums, including 70% in Downtown Mixed Use. It then states that nearly all commenters opposed the increased large-building review threshold and the 70% maximum building coverage in DMU.

Last week, I asked Agnew::Beck for more specificity on the nature of the public opposition to 70% lot coverage, including whether the comments came primarily from the general public, staff, commissioners, or elected officials, and whether opposition to lot coverage was distinct from opposition to the large-format threshold. I am waiting to hear back.

In the meantime, I think it is important not to treat these two issues as though they are the same.

The proposal to raise the large-format threshold understandably generated concern. Many residents do not want to make it easier to build very large commercial buildings in our downtown mixed use district without public review, and I agree that the threshold should remain at 15,000 square feet.

The 70% lot coverage question is different. Allowing up to 70% building coverage in the Downtown Mixed Use district simply gives property owners in the Town Center the option to build in a more compact, traditional downtown pattern if they choose to do so.

That distinction matters because one change moves us closer to the Town Center vision, while the other would move us away from it. Allowing higher lot coverage in DMU could help make possible the kind of walkable downtown core we have been discussing for years: buildings closer to the sidewalk, active ground-floor uses, parking to the side or rear, and enough building frontage to create a real street edge.

A 50% maximum may be appropriate in some commercial or transitional districts. But in the downtown core, and especially if applied to the Town Center as it is developed, it risks preserving and expanding a more suburban development pattern by requiring too much of each lot to remain outside the building footprint, even when an owner wants to build a more compact, mixed-use downtown project.

Other Town Center codes often allow higher coverage in their urban center districts. According to ChatGPT, Bradenton, Florida allows 80% maximum lot coverage in its T5 Urban Center district and 90% in its T6 Urban Core district; and Hutchins, Texas allows 80% maximum building coverage in its Town Center District and requires buildings to be close to the street. Homer does not need to copy those cities, but these examples suggest that 70% lot coverage in a Town Center district is moderate, not extreme.

For those reasons, I support the staff/team recommendation to return the large-format retail and wholesale threshold to 15,000 square feet, but I do not support reducing the Downtown Mixed Use maximum building coverage from 70% to 50%. I would prefer to keep the 70% maximum in DMU and pair it with good standards for frontage, parking location, pedestrian access, stormwater, lighting, screening, and transitions to nearby residential areas.

Allowing business owners and developers to opt for 70% lot coverage in DMU would not force dense development. It would merely avoid prohibiting the kind of compact, walkable Town Center development Homer says it wants.