



Agenda Item: Orig. Ordinance - 1st Reading

Title: Original Ordinance No. 2025 amending the City of Laramie’s official zoning map to zone a city block, Block 212, Original Laramie Final Plat, located at 710 Garfield Street as DC (Downtown Commercial) District within the City of Laramie.

Recommended Council MOTION:

Move to **approve** Original Ordinance No. 2025, on first reading, establishing DC Zoning District for a city block, Block 212, Original Laramie Final Plat, approximately 1.8 acres in size, located at 710 Garfield Street, in accordance with findings of fact and conclusions of law; and to set a public hearing for April 20, 2021.

Administrative or Policy Goal:

Thrive Laramie and Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use:

The Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use (FLU) Map (Map 3.2) shows this area as Public Institutional. This land use was specifically created for government buildings, grade schools and other uses that are for the public’s benefit or act as assets. Due to the one-off nature of this land use, no zoning districts were recommended for the land use and was left open to future interpretation by staff and owners. Staff and owners felt that the use of LPCC fell mostly in line with the future land use classification of Urban Commercial and that the DC District offered the Urban Commercial feel, while being more neighborhood friendly, compared to B1 or B2, which a majority of is found along our major commercial corridors.

The City of Laramie Comprehensive Plan and the Thrive Laramie: Community and Economic Development Action Strategy include recommendations to enact a future vision for Laramie as a welcoming cultural capital, education hub, and center for economic opportunity for all current and future residents.

Under Chapter 3 of the Laramie Comprehensive Plan, Urban Commercial is best described through the following sentence: “Downtown Laramie represents an urban character as a result of its high floor-to-site area ratios (multiple stories) with zero setbacks along the street front, uses that are common of today’s downtown environments, and a mixed pedestrian and vehicular orientation. Increased population, a residential component, infill, redevelopment, appropriately scaled streetscape improvements, kiosks, awning or canopies, projecting business signs, public plazas and gathering areas, and employment in these areas can further enhance the Urban Commercial Classification.”

Staff believes that the LPCC meets the Urban Commercial criteria and character set forth in the description of the urban commercial designation. LPCC has a similar building to street ratio that is found in the historic downtown, with pedestrians walking right underneath its walls, while also having a typical, neighborhood commercial area around LPCC. Adjacent to LPCC are a multitude of uses. There is a faith based organization, a multi-family complex, a school cafeteria prep area, the Albany County Library and a number of single-family residential units, matching a similar, mixed-use pattern to that found in the original DC District.

In the Laramie Comprehensive Plan, Urban Character is defined through, “An urban center is designed with an intensity of use to draw people into close contact, where congestion and personal encounters are both expected and essential for a vibrant community center.” As noted above and in the applicants cover letter, the LPCC is home to many uses that bring people together and creates an internal community within the development. With this zoning, staff hopes that the internal use will begin to spill out into the surrounding areas, creating the start of a vibrant, sister district to our downtown.

Within the *Thrive Laramie* economic development plan under “Fostering an Entrepreneurial Culture,” it states that the absence or presence of a strong and thriving entrepreneurial culture is a factor that limits or expands small businesses in Laramie. LPCC is a development that has this ethos at their core, by creating affordable, entry spaces for small businesses to enter, non-profits to thrive and a for collaboration to have a home. By rezoning this district to DC, this ensures that the uses that have thrived within the LPCC will continue to be able to do so without something triggering too much work or causing too much cost for improvements.

Background:

The Laramie Plains Civic Center is located 1 block south of Grand Avenue, bounded by Garfield Street to the north, Custer Street to the south and between 7th and 8th Streets. The 3 story brick building, which now encompasses a full city block was first established in this location back in 1878 with two major additions beginning completed in 1928 and 1939 respectively. The building served as Laramie’s High School and then the Laramie Junior High until 1978. Since the closure of the Laramie Junior High, the Civic Center as we know it today has been used as a space for small businesses, artists, non-profits, faith institutions, pottery studios, educational facilities and institutions, radio stations, event spaces, gymnasiums, The Gryphon Theatre and much more since 1982. The full list of tenants is provided within the cover letter, submitted by the applicant. With all of these uses, the Laramie Plains Civic Center has established itself as more of a Community Center rather than a typical commercial development, especially based on the uses, the historic nature of the structure and the unique development pattern this building presents.

Staff believes that the LPCC meets the intent of the DC Zone District based off of its density, building style, form, existing uses and its existing functionality as a community hub and multi-use building. While the DC District is titled “Downtown Commercial”, the district was not originally intended for use just in what we consider the traditional “Downtown”. During the development of the, Downtown Commercial district in 2010, the title given to the district by staff was the “Urban Commercial Zoning District”. However, during the adoption process the name was recommended to be changed by City Council to “Downtown Commercial” and the name stuck. Despite the name, the district is designed to allow for a wide variety of retail, entertainment, finance and office uses, as well as a mix of uses including residential development.

Rezoning the LPCC from R3 to DC brings the longstanding use of the property into closer conformance with a zoning district, than the current R3 zone that it is today. Furthermore, the DC zone protects the building and site from the possible need for future variance requests due to the form of building filing the entire block and no on-site parking, just to name a few examples. Because the DC zone does not require parking for commercial uses and has very minimal required residential parking standards continued use of the building as it currently operates or possible expansions of uses can occur more easily.

Planning Commission Background

Planning Commission recommended approval of Z-21-01 at the March 8, 2021 meeting with a vote of Aye: 5. Nay: 0 Absent: 1.

Public Comment

Staff has received multiple inquiries surrounding the zoning amendment, but each call just wanted to know what a zoning amendment meant and had no issues with the proposal.

Legal/Statutory Authority:

- Laramie Municipal Code: Title 15 (Unified Development Code)
- Wyoming State Statutes Title 15 Cities and Towns, Article 5 Planning
- Wyoming State Statutes Title 15 Cities and Towns, Article 6 Zoning
- Laramie Comprehensive Plan
- Thrive Laramie Community and Economic Development Action Strategy 2020

BUDGET FISCAL INFORMATION:

REVENUE

Source	Amount	Type
Fees/Charges for Service	\$665.00	Zoning Amendment Application plus sign fees
Grant		
Loan		
Other		
Total	\$665.00	

Responsible Staff:

Todd Feezer, Assistant City Manager,
721-5304
Matthew Cox, Associate Planner,
721-5344

Future dates are subject to change

Advertised	
Public Hearing (PH) Held	April 20, 2021
PH Advertised	April 3, 2021
Introduction/1 st Reading	April 6, 2021
2 nd Reading	April 20, 2021
3 rd Reading	May 4, 2021

Attachments:

- Proposed Ordinance No. 2025
- Planning Commission Staff Report (March 8, 2021)
- Applicant Cover Letter (4 pages)