

Zoning Text Amendment – Walking Area Overlay District and the Official Zoning Map

Staff Report: Andy Bauer
Application: ZTA25-10

Planning Commission Meeting Date: January 27, 2026
Applicant: City of Gulf Shores

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

City staff proposes to amend the boundaries of the Walking Area Overlay District on the “Official Zoning Map” and modify the definition of the Walking Area Overlay District in the Zoning Ordinance.

BACKGROUND

- Walking Area Overlay District - On June 13, 2005, Ordinance No. 1329 was adopted by City Council, creating Beach Area Zoning and Overlay Districts.

The Walking Area Overlay District was intended to provide supplemental provisions for development within the blocks around the intersection of Gulf Shores Parkway and Beach Boulevard and to transform this area into a mixed-use, pedestrian friendly downtown. The Zoning Ordinance extends the following benefits to properties within the Walking Area Overlay District:

- i. Incentive Bonus Density and Building Height are an option for developers in exchange for providing certain public benefits.
 - ii. Modifications to underlying zoning and overlay district standards if such deviations are found to comply with the goals and intent of the Future Land Use Plan.
 - iii. Mixed-use Condominium uses.
 - iv. Parking Reductions for mixed-use developments in the overlay district.
- Land Use Plan – The intersection of Beach Boulevard and Highway 59 is the city’s traditional center of beach-oriented tourism and its primary image in the minds of many visitors. The redevelopment of Gulf Place will serve as a catalyst for economic development and a means for Gulf Shores to be identified as a world-class beach resort. The City should consider new updated zoning regulations that support the desired scale and development for a mixed use, walkable, pedestrian oriented beach front.
 - Vision 2025 – Action 5: Gulf Beach District - The construction of a walkable, energetic beachfront district will attract tourism, stimulate local business, and encourage business and residential relocation.

BACKGROUND

December 16, 2025, Planning Commission meeting. This amendment was tabled by the Planning due to the number of single-family houses and duplexes that would be made nonconforming uses.

ISSUE

The redevelopment of the area around the intersection of Beach Boulevard and Gulf Shores Parkway into a pedestrian friendly, mixed-use district has long been a goal of the City's. The Walking Area Overlay District only allows residential and lodging uses in mixed-use buildings of which a minimum of 10% of the ground level is reserved for commercial use. Stand alone, low-density single-family houses, duplexes, and townhouse uses are not allowed. Expanding the Walking Area Overlay District into the nearby blocks will incentivize more mixed-use developments (ground floor commercial/residential & lodging uses) to provide the critical mass of activity essential to creating a thriving mixed-use, pedestrian friendly downtown district.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The proposed Zoning Text Amendment will modify the definition of Walking Area Overlay District, update the Official City of Gulf Shores Zoning Map to expand the Walking Area Overlay District boundaries, and add a savings clause for existing single-family, and duplex dwellings to allow them to be rebuilt if destroyed.

The goal of the amendment is to expand the Walking Area Overlay District to further implement the recommendations of the Land Use Plan and Vision 2025 Plan to create a dense, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented downtown district in the beach area.

Below is a summary of the proposed changes. Proposed new text is indicated with **red font**.

1. AMEND Article 4: Definitions.
Walking Area Overlay District: The boundaries of the Walking Area Overlay District are shown in the "~~City of Gulf Shores Walking Area Zoning Map~~" "**City of Gulf Shores Zoning Map.**" The provisions of this Ordinance applicable specifically to the Walking Area Overlay District shall apply exclusively to all parcels of land and rights-of-way, or portions thereof, within the boundaries of the Walking Area Overlay District. Any Parcel of land that is wholly or partly within the boundary shall be included.
2. AMEND City of Gulf Shores Zoning Map to expand the Walking Area Overlay District westward to West 6th Street to include properties zoned BT-3 and BT-4, located south of West 1st Avenue, eastward to the middle of the block between East 3rd Street and East 4th Street to include properties zoned BT-3 and BT-4 south of East 1st Avenue, and north to include the BT-1 North zoned properties along Gulf Shores Parkway. (see attached map)

ANALYSIS

Impacts of Overlay District Expansion

The proposed expansion of the Walking Area Overlay District would include 152 additional properties; and 14 properties will be removed. The 14 properties to be removed from the Walking Area Overlay District are located on East 1st and 2nd Avenues, are developed with single-family or duplex uses, are a part of the established subdivision lot and block pattern, and

less likely to be redeveloped. There are no cottage subdivisions located within the proposed boundaries of the Walking Area Overlay District. Below is a breakdown of the zoning and existing land uses on the 152 properties.

Zoning

BT-4 Zoned Properties – 28
 BT-3 Zoned Properties – 73
 BT-2 Zoned Properties – 10
 BT-1 North Zoned Properties – 39
 OS Zoned Properties – 2

Land Uses

Vacant – 27 properties (17%)
 Single-family or Duplex Dwelling – 33 properties (22%)
 Multi-family/Hotel – 30 properties (20%)
 Commercial – 52 properties (34%)
 Mixed-Use – 4 (3%)
 Public Beach/Park – 6 properties (4%)

Synopsis

The boundaries of the Walking Area Overlay District have not been extended since its adoption in 2005. There is no actual increase in by-right entitlements granted to properties within the Walking Area Overlay District. The only difference is residential, and lodging are only allowed in mixed-use developments that contain commercial uses. Staff do not see any detriment to extending the Walking Area Overlay District to include these six blocks on the north and south sides of Beach Boulevard and BT-1 North properties adjacent to Gulf Shores Parkway. The proposed expansion will only increase the opportunity to achieve the City’s Vision 2025 and Land Use Plan recommendations to create mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented developments within the Beach Area.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the zoning text amendment as drafted.

MOTION FOR CONSIDERATION

I make a motion to approve the zoning text amendment as drafted.

ADDENDUM

After discussion by the Planning Commission at the December meeting about the number of single-family and duplex dwellings that will become nonconforming uses upon approval of this amendment, an option for the Planning Commission is to add a savings clause. A savings clause will allow single-family and duplex dwellings that have been destroyed by any natural disaster or catastrophic event to be reconstructed. Below is language that could be added to Article 13-4, D. 3. *Savings Clause* of the Zoning Ordinance. Proposed new text is indicated with **red font**.

3. AMEND Article 13-4., D., 3. Savings Clause Applicable to Certain Nonconforming Condominiums, **Single-family Dwellings, and Duplex Dwellings.**

4. AMEND Article 13-4., D., 3., c. These savings clause provisions shall be applicable only to legal nonconforming Condominium structures that are located within the Beach Overlay District, the Walking Area Overlay District, and Lagoon Pass Overlay District **and Single-family and Duplex structures located in the Walking Area Overlay District.**