

Tarpon To Modify Chain-Store Restrictions

By [Mark Schantz](#) | The Suncoast News

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TARPON SPRINGS - [City commissioners](#) asked planning staff to tweak their proposed ordinance restricting big-box and chain store businesses from coming into the city so developers are made to feel more welcomed.

Tuesday night, commissioners did not give staff a deadline for making changes to the proposed ordinance.

If adopted as originally written, the ordinance would place restrictions on where big-box retailers could locate within the city. The rules would also control the size and appearance of such "formula-based" retail outlets and [force developers](#) to seek a [conditional use permit](#) from the City Commission before building one. Mayor Beverley Billiris said [commercial sectors](#) of the city, such as the downtown, need an economic revival. The city should not chase away [corporate developers](#) from the city's [commercial core](#) because a popular chain store could give [downtown revitalization](#) a boost, she said.

If the original version of the chain-store regulations proposed by the planning division were approved popular retailers such as a Panera [Bread bakery](#) cafe or Starbucks [gourmet coffee shop](#) would have to seek conditional use approval, Billiris said. Adding this extra layer of bureaucracy would not be useful, she said. [Assistant City Attorney](#) Shauna Morris said the regulations planning staff proposed seek to control formula-based businesses not keep them out of the city. Staff wanted such businesses to fit the aesthetics and character of the surrounding neighborhood, Morris said.

According to the ordinance, formula businesses can have significant financial advantages that would allow them to force smaller, independent businesses out of the market. This could reduce the diversity of merchandise on sale in the local market, the ordinance states.

Under the proposed ordinance, no more than two formula businesses would be permitted on a downtown parcel. Store frontage would be limited to 50 linear feet for each shop and [retail buildings](#) could be no taller than two stories.

City officials asked Morris and Renae Vincent, city planner, whether the 50-square-foot frontage limitation would prohibit the Kmart store at U.S. 19 and Tarpon Avenue from being renovated to accommodate a different retailer if the Kmart ever closed.

It would, Vincent said. She said she would revisit the frontage limitation and decide whether 50 feet is too restrictive.

After hearing the concerns of commissioners, staff decided to study whether requiring a minimum separation between formula businesses would be better than only allowing two per parcel.

Commissioner Chris Alahouzos said the city is not trying to keep out large chain retailers. It does, however, need to set design guidelines that will help preserve the town's character and environment.

Given the number of vacant downtown storefronts, a well-placed, moderately sized formula business could be good for downtown development, Alahouzos said. Staff should have the option of approving smaller projects to speed up the permit process, he said.

Commissioner Susan Slattery said she wants to foster economic development and revitalize the business districts. So she does not want an ordinance that is so restrictive that it chases away corporate businesses from considering Tarpon Springs.

If asked, some major retailers are willing to alter their basic store designs to accommodate local development guidelines, Morris said.

Mark Schantz can be reached at 727-815-1075 or mschantz@suncoastnews.com.