

# MEMORANDUM



**TO:** VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER  
**FROM:** LINDSAY BELL, AICP, SENIOR PLANNER  
**SUBJECT:** CAR WASHES  
**DATE:** JUNE 18, 2025

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## BACKGROUND

In recent years, the City has received many inquiries to develop car wash facilities. The proliferation of this use is a nation-wide trend. According to an NPR interview, in 1996 about half of all car washes were done at home, while today about 80% are done at a commercial facility. In addition, the car wash model is very attractive to investors because the low labor requirements and convenient membership models bring in big annual returns.

Revenues from car washes are up 28% since the pandemic, and utilize a similar structure to a gym membership: once subscribed, customers are more likely to use a service even if they don't need it, or to stay subscribed even when not using it frequently. Today there are over 60,000 locations across the U.S., with a 5% annual growth rate. Some forecasts predict that the number of car washes in the U.S. will double by 2030.

The risk of continuing the trend to build more car washes is oversaturation of the market, with the revenue of existing car washes decreasing with each new one that opens as they compete for customers. Due to the specific design of a car wash building, if the business is not able to survive the competition, it could be difficult to repurpose the structure for another use. There is also the opportunity cost of having more developments that do not provide many jobs instead of businesses that employ more people per square foot.

Staff prepared the **attached map** that shows the locations of the existing and proposed car washes in Novi. The white labels reference existing car washes, while the green labels note existing smaller car washes that are accessory to a gas station. The two yellow labels represent new car washes that have been submitted for site plan review – both are on properties zoned B-3, so the use is principal permitted, or permitted as of right (*without* the discretion for approval that a Special Land Use would allow).

	Name	Location	Parcel size	Type	Status
1	Squeaky Shine	Novi Road	1.56 ac	Automatic tunnel	Opened 2020
2	Pure Wash	Meadowbrook/10 Mile	1.09 ac	Automatic tunnel	Opened 2024
3	Original \$6 Car Wash	Novi Road/Grand River	0.54 ac	Automatic tunnel	Proposed rebranding to El Car Wash in process –

					existing non-conforming in TC District
4	El Car Wash	Grand River/12 Mile	1.29 ac	Automatic tunnel	Under Construction
5	BP Gas Station	12 Mile/Novi Road	1.37 ac	Small automatic, accessory use	Built 1991
6	Mobile Gas Station	Grand River/Haggerty	1.87 ac	Small automatic, accessory use	Built 1987
7	Quick Pass	Novi Road/10 Mile	4.8 ac	Automatic tunnel	PC approved PSP
8	Grand/Beck Development	Grand River/Beck Road	3.7 ac	Automatic tunnel	Preliminary Site Plan submitted

### EXISTING ORDINANCE STANDARDS

In the City of Novi, Auto Washes are a principal permitted use only in the B-3 General Business District. There are no specific use standards in Section 4.32 except for the requirement that they are completely enclosed in a building. Otherwise, they are expected to comply with the requirements of the B-3 District for building and parking setbacks, and building height (Section 3.1.12).

Section 3.10 contains Required Conditions for the B-1, B-2 and B-3 Districts, and states that overhead/service bay doors shall not face a major thoroughfare nor an abutting residential district. Car washes often have to seek a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals for this condition because of the long tunnel design typical of car wash buildings with an entrance and exit door make it difficult to avoid having one overhead door facing the road.

Modern car washes often have outdoor vacuum stations as an accessory use, which does require an outdoor component. This should be addressed in any proposed text amendment.

### COMPARISON WITH OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Farmington Hills recently amended its Zoning Ordinance to state that in the B-3 District, vehicle washes are only permitted on properties that had a legally conforming vehicle wash as of the date of their ordinance amendment. They also have specific use standards to be met – see attachment.

Farmington – Automobile washes are a Special Land Use in the C-3 (Commercial) District.

Plymouth – Automobile car washes are permitted as a Special Land Use in the B-3 and ARC (Ann Arbor Road Corridor) Districts, subject to several use standards (see attachment).

Wixom – car washes are a Special Land Use in their B-3 District, and a permitted use in the FS District. There are a few use standards that must be met. See attachment.

Bloomfield Township – Completely enclosed “auto laundries” are a permitted use in their B-3 and Light Manufacturing districts, with no use standards.

### **ORDINANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE INPUT**

The ORC discussed a potential car wash text amendment at their April 21, 2025 meeting. The committee supported moving the use from principle permitted to special land use and adding use conditions. The Committee also mentioned exploring removing car washes from the B-3, General Business district and placing them in another district.

Staff considered the possibility of removing the use from the B-3 district. However, the B-3 District is intended to accommodate the more intense commercial uses in the City. The less intense B-1 or B-2 Districts would not be appropriate. Similarly, we would not want to put this auto-oriented use in any of the mixed-use districts that are envisioned to be more pedestrian-oriented.

The industrial districts were also considered as options, however there are many more I-1, Light Industrial zoned parcels in the City compared to B-3, so we believe allowing them in I-1 could lead to more car wash applications rather than discouraging them. There are 358 parcels in Novi zoned I-1, with a total area of approximately 1,162 acres.

There are 68 properties zoned B-3 in Novi, comprising a total of about 163 acres. Fifty of the B-3 zoned properties are 1 acre or larger. The committee could consider whether a larger minimum lot size would be more appropriate for car washes. There are about 30 properties zoned B-3 that are 2 acres or larger. The Committee could further restrict car washes by requiring a minimum parcel size of 2 acres.

See attached map for areas of I-1 and B-3 parcels.

### **PROPOSED ORDINANCE**

The text amendment proposed by Staff would change the use from Principal Permitted to the more discretionary Special Land Use in the B-3 District. This would not impact the smaller accessory car washes that are sometimes found at gas stations. The specific use standards in Section 4.32 would include:

1. Minimum lot size – 1 acre (*ALTERNATIVE- could consider 2 acre minimum*)
2. 40-foot minimum front yard setback
3. Minimum 100-foot setback from residential properties (includes building, vacuums, vehicle stacking)
4. Outdoor vacuum stations shall not be in front yard, with noise controlled by sound barriers to meet noise performance standards (Section 5.14)
5. Overhead doors shall not face residential-zoned properties, or must be screened by another building or wall.
6. Vehicle stacking spaces shall be outside the public right-of-way and meet the drive-through requirements of Section 5.3.11
7. By-pass lane (10-feet) required

## NON-CONFORMITIES CREATED

If the proposed text amendment is adopted as proposed, some of the existing car washes will become non-conforming with the new standards. Only one is on a parcel less than 1 acre – however this is the existing non-conforming car wash in the Town Center District, so a new non-conformity is not created.

	Name	Location	Parcel size Conformance	Setback Conformance	Other Conformance
1	Squeaky Shine	Novi Road	Yes	Yes	Across Novi Road from residential, but greater than 100 feet
2	Pure Wash	Meadowbrook/10 Mile	Yes	Yes	
3	Original \$6 Car Wash	Novi Road/Grand River	<b>No</b>	Yes	Non-conforming in TC District
4	El Car Wash	Grand River/12 Mile	Yes	Yes	
5	Quick Pass	Novi Road/10 Mile	Yes	<b>No</b> (30 ft proposed)	
6	Grand/Beck Development	Grand River/Beck Road	Yes	Yes	

STATE OF MICHIGAN

COUNTY OF OAKLAND

CITY OF NOVI

ORDINANCE NO. 18.306

**AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CITY OF NOVI CODE OF ORDINANCES, ORDINANCE 14-271, THE CITY OF NOVI ZONING ORDINANCE, AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS: ARTICLE 3, SECTION 3.1.12 “B-3 GENERAL BUSINESS DISTRICT”; AND ARTICLE 4, SECTION 4.32 “AUTO WASHES”; IN ORDER TO RECLASSIFY AUTO WASHES FROM PRINCIPAL PERMITTED USES TO SPECIAL LAND USES IN THE B-3 DISTRICT, AND TO ADD USE STANDARDS TO BE MET BY NEW AUTO WASH ESTABLISHMENTS.**

**THE CITY OF NOVI ORDAINS:**

**Part I.**

That the City of Novi Zoning Ordinance, as amended, Article 3, Zoning Districts, Section 3.1.12, “B-3 General Business District,” is hereby amended to read as follows:

**Section 3.1.12 B-3 General Business District**

A. [unchanged]

B. Principal Permitted Uses

- i. Retail businesses use ☐
- ii. Retail business service uses ☐
- iii. Dry cleaning establishments, or pick-up stations, dealing directly with the consumer §4.24
- iv.- Business establishments which perform services on the premises
- v. Professional services ☐
- vi. Retail business or retail business service establishments §4.27
- vii. Professional and medical offices, including laboratories
- viii. Fueling station ☐ §4.29
- ix. Sale of produce and seasonal plant materials outdoors §4.30
- ~~x. Auto wash §4.32~~
- xi. Bus passenger stations
- xii. New and used car salesroom, showroom, or office
- xiii. Other uses similar to the above uses
- ~~xiii~~iv. Tattoo parlors ☐
- xiv. Publicly owned and operated parks, parkways and outdoor recreational facilities
- xv. Accessory structures and uses ☐ §4.19 customarily incident to the above permitted uses
- xvii. Public or private health and fitness facilities and clubs §4.34
- xviii. Microbreweries ☐ §4.35
- ~~xiii~~ix. Brewpubs ☐ §4.35
- xix. Day care centers, and adult day care centers §4.12.2

C. Special Land Uses

- i. Outdoor space for exclusive sale of new or used automobiles, campers, recreation vehicles, mobile homes ☐, or rental of trailers or automobiles §4.36

- ii. Motel §4.28
- iii. Business in the character of a drive-in or open front store §4.37
- iv. Veterinary hospitals or clinics §4.31
- v. Plant materials nursery §4.6
- vi. Public or private indoor and private outdoor recreational facilities §4.38
- vii. Mini-lube or oil change establishments §4.39
- viii. Sale of produce and seasonal plant materials outdoors §4.30
- ix. Restaurant in the character of a fast food carryout, drive-in, fast food drive through, or fast food sit-down §4.40
- x. Auto Wash §4.32

D. [unchanged]

## **Part II.**

That the City of Novi Zoning Ordinance, as amended, Article 4, "Use Standards," Section 4.32, "Auto Washes," is hereby amended to read as follows:

### **Section 4.32 Auto Washes**

In the B-3 District, Auto Wash is a Special Land Use and subject to the following standards: permitted use when completely enclosed in a building.

1. A minimum lot size of 1 acre;
2. All buildings shall have a front yard setback of not less than 40 feet;
3. All buildings, vehicular stacking space, vacuuming, or other outside use area except parking, shall be located no closer than one-hundred (100) feet from a residentially-zoned and/or -used property unless such property is separated from the Auto Wash by a major thoroughfare or railroad right-of-way;
4. All washing facilities shall be within a completely enclosed building;
5. Vacuuming and drying areas may be located outside the building but shall not be in the required front yard, and shall not be closer than one-hundred (100) feet from any residential district. Noise from vacuuming or blow-drying equipment shall be controlled by appropriate enclosures or sound barrier walls. All noise from such equipment shall comply with the city's noise performance standards of Section 5.14.
6. All vehicle stacking shall be provided space outside of any public right-of-way, and shall meet the requirements of drive-throughs as applicable in Section 5.3.11;
7. One 10-foot bypass lane shall be provided as a means of exiting the wash queue without having to enter the auto wash building;
8. Ingress and egress points shall be located at least one-hundred (100) feet from the intersection of any two streets;
9. All buildings shall be oriented such that bay doors and/or open bays face away from residentially-zoned and/or -used property unless screened from such property by a building or wall.

## **Part III.**

That the City of Novi Zoning Ordinance, as amended, Article 5, "Site Standards," Section 5.3, "Off-Street Stacking Space, Layout Standards, Construction and Maintenance," is hereby amended to read as follows:

1-10. [unchanged]

11. Any lane, route, or path in which vehicles are directed expressly for the purposes of receiving or dispensing persons, goods, or services without the driver leaving the vehicle (hereinafter referred to as a drive-through lane) shall comply with the following requirements:

A-C. [unchanged]

D. Drive-through facilities shall provide one bypass lane to allow unobstructed travel for vehicles to pass those waiting to be served. Such bypass lane shall be a minimum of ~~ten (10) eighteen~~ ~~(+18)~~ feet in width, unless otherwise determined by the Fire Marshal.

E-I. [unchanged]

12-13. [unchanged]

### **PART III.**

**Severability.** Should any section, subdivision, clause, or phrase of this Ordinance be declared by the courts to be invalid, the validity of the Ordinance as a whole, or in part, shall not be affected other than the part invalidated.

### **PART IV.**

**Savings Clause.** The amendment of the Novi Code of Ordinances set forth in this Ordinance does not affect or impair any act done, offense committed, or right accruing, accrued, or acquired or liability, penalty, forfeiture or punishment, pending or incurred prior to the amendment of the Novi Code of Ordinances set forth in this Ordinance.

### **PART V.**

**Repealer.** All other Ordinance or parts of Ordinance in conflict herewith are hereby repealed only to the extent necessary to give this Ordinance full force and effect.

### **PART VI.**

**Effective Date: Publication.** Public hearing having been held hereon pursuant to the provisions of Section 103 of Act 110 of the Public Acts of 2006, as amended, the provisions of this Ordinance shall be published within fifteen (15) days of its adoption by publication of a brief notice in a newspaper circulated in the City of Novi stating the date of enactment and effective date, a brief statement as to its regulatory effect and that a complete copy of the Ordinance is available for public purchase, use and inspection at the office of the City Clerk during the hours of 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Local Time. The provisions of this Ordinance shall become effective seven (7) days after its publication.

MADE, PASSED, AND ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NOVI, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN, ON THE \_\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

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JUSTIN P. FISCHER, MAYOR

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CORTNEY HANSON, CITY CLERK

DRAFT 6/20/25

Ayes:

Nays:

Abstentions:

Absent: