

**POLK COUNTY  
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE  
STAFF REPORT**

<b>DRC Date:</b> January 29, 2026	<b>Level of Review:</b> Level 4 Review
<b>PC Date:</b> February 4, 2026	<b>Type:</b> LDC Text Amendment
<b>BoCC Date:</b> March 3, 2026	<b>Case Numbers:</b> LDCT-2025-26
March 17, 2026	<b>Case Name:</b> Car Washes
<b>Applicant:</b> Polk County	<b>Case Planner:</b> Ian Nance/Owen Davis

<b>Request:</b>	A County-initiated LDC Text Amendment to multiple sections of the Code to consolidate car wash uses in the Use Tables, Conditional Use Criteria, and glossary. This will adopt “Car Wash” as the sole primary use and “Accessory Car Washes” as an accessory use.
<b>DRC Recommendation:</b>	Approval
<b>Planning Commission Vote:</b>	Approval 7-0

**Among the changes to Section 205, Use Table:**

- Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes from Use Table.

**Among the changes to Section 206, Accessory Uses:**

- Adding LDC Section 206.S for Accessory Car Wash Facilities and standards.

**Among the changes to Section 303, Criteria for Conditional Uses:**

- Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.”
- Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.

**Among the Changes to Chapter 4, Special Districts:**

- Ronald Reagan SAP – Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.
- US 27 SAP – Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental Car Washes.”
- US 98 SAP - Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental Car Washes.”

- North Ridge SAP – Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental Car Washes.”
- Brewster SAP - Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.
- Southeast Polk SAP - Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.
- Grenelefe Utility Enclave Area - Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental Car Washes.”
- Wahneta Neighborhood Plan - Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.

**Among the Changes to Chapter 7, Section 708, Parking Space Requirements:**

- Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash.” Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes.

**Among the Changes to Chapter 10, Definitions:**

- Removing reference to “Full-Service Car Wash” to be replaced with “Car Wash” and providing a new definition. Eliminating “Incidental” and “Self-Service” Car Washes. Adding definition for “Accessory Car Wash.”

**Summary:**

The Land Development Code has three definitions for car washes that are categorized within the Code as primary uses: Full-Service; Self-Service; and Incidental. Incidental Car Washes are those that are usually associated with gas stations. Self-Service facilities are those that provide a stall and pressure cleaner in which the owner of the vehicle washes the vehicle. Full-Service models are defined as being automated with the driver leaving the vehicle as it is being washed.

This last definition is out-of-date with modern car wash facilities that allow drivers to remain in the vehicle and often have self-service bays. Most will have at least a few crew members to help with the automatic wash while providing other vehicle detailing services.

This amendment essentially moves Incidental Car Washes into the Accessory Uses section of the LDC and removes it from the Use Tables. In effect, if a gas station is allowed in a future land use district, the accessory car wash will be as well, if the conditions can be met. The Use Tables will no longer guide where these are allowed.

This amendment will eliminate the terms Full-Service and Self-Service Car Washes from the definitions, Use Tables, and Conditional Use Criteria in the Code. These will be combined simply under “Car Washes” and provided a new definition.

The overall purpose of this amendment is to streamline the Code as it relates to this use and prevent confusion with applicants whose car washes might not meet current definitions. There will be few changes aside from semantics – the conditional use criteria for all three were the same throughout most of the County, and they are not being amended, though a reference to standards for Drive-Thru Facilities is being added. This has been a requirement for automated car washes that was not directly addressed in the conditional use standards. This amendment is not adding full-service or self-service car washes where they were previously not allowed, except in the Southeast Polk SAP where self-service facilities were allowed but full-service facilities were not (Rural Cluster Centers). With this amendment Car Washes will be conditionally allowed here.

Next, no car washes are currently allowed as primary uses in the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern Use Table, aside from those allowable in an overlapping SAP; however, with this amendment, gas stations in the Polk City Special Protection Area (SPA) could have an accessory car wash in a handful of Future Land Use districts, if the proposed conditions for approval are met. This would also be true for gas stations in the Rural SPA and Commercial Enclave future land use districts. Ultimately, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is the regulatory agency that permits and oversees car washes.

Finally, the Use Table in the North Ridge SAP erroneously allows Full Service and Incidental Car Washes in the Residential Medium (RMX) future land use district. This is contrary to what the Comprehensive Plan and LDC allows in residential districts, and this amendment will correct this mistake

### **Relevant Sections, Policies, and/or Regulations to Consider:**

LDC Table 2.1 Use Table  
LDC Section 206 Accessory Uses  
LDC Section 303 Conditional Use Criteria  
LDC Chapter 4 Special Districts Use Tables  
LDC Chapter 7, Section 708, Parking Space Requirements  
LDC Chapter 10 Definitions

### **Findings of Fact**

- *A County-initiated LDC Text Amendment to multiple sections of the Code to consolidate car wash uses in the Use Tables, Conditional Use Criteria, and glossary. This will adopt “Car Wash” as the sole primary use and “Accessory Car Washes” as an accessory use.*
- *LDC Chapter 10 defines CAR WASH, FULL SERVICE as, “any facility providing complete car washing and cleaning services. Car washing is generally automatic, with the driver leaving the car during the washing procedure. Waxing and detailing may also be provided.”*
- *LDC Chapter 10 defines CAR WASH, INCIDENTAL as, “any automated car wash which is incidental to the sale of fuel and characterized by an automatic wash which requires the*

*driver to remain in the vehicle during operation. The facility may be an attached or a free-standing structure.”*

- *LDC Chapter 10 defines CAR WASH, SELF SERVICE as, “any facility providing stalls with water, soap, wax, or other materials for cleaning vehicles by individuals.”*
- *LDC Section 303 requires the following standards for all car wash facilities:*
  1. *The minimum distance to any residentially designated property shall be 50 feet measured at the narrowest point between the property line of the residential property and either the stacking lane, car washing enclosure, or detailing area, whichever is closer. All car wash activities shall be screened from off-site residential view.*
  2. *Land use activities containing car washes located adjacent to residentially designated properties shall, at a minimum, provide a landscaped buffer equal to a Type C buffer (see Section 720) between the entire property and adjacent residential areas.*
  3. *All car wash operations shall be required to connect to public or community sanitary sewer, a Car Wash Recycle System, or similar wastewater treatment system approved by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection or other applicable regulatory agency.*
  4. *All car wash operations shall be required to connect re-use water where and when it is available.*
- *The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is the regulatory agency that permits and oversees car washes. Rule 62-660.803, F.A.C. authorizes a general permit for any person constructing or operating a car wash treatment, disposal, and recycled system with an effective date of 12/24/1996.*
- *LDC Section 912 allows any property owner, BoCC, or agency to apply to the Department to amend the text of this Code, the text of the Comprehensive Plan, or the Future Land Use Map Series (FLUMS) in compliance with procedures prescribed by the Department.*
- *This application has been reviewed for consistency with applicable Comprehensive Plan and LDC policies.*

The Land Development Division, based on the information provided with the proposed text amendment application, finds that the proposed text change request is **CONSISTENT** with the Polk County Land Development Code and the Polk County Comprehensive Plan. Staff recommends **Approval of LDCT-2025-26**.

### **Analysis:**

In recent years, car washes have proliferated throughout Polk County, especially near higher-density residential areas. Newer facilities are highly efficient with their water consumption, often

considered to be more so than individuals washing their vehicles at home. Modern technologies encourage the reuse of rinse and wastewater generated by car washes. These recycling systems are good for the environment as they are designed to catch run-off from seeping into pervious areas and will conserve water. Business owners also save money by reusing water rather than using clean municipal water for each customer.

As these benefits have been realized, newer facilities have been built in the County and are generally popular with customers. Many operate with a membership service while some provide a limited retail component. Most automated washes quickly pull vehicles through the wash while drivers remain inside. Oftentimes, the driver is directed to a detailing area to clean the insides of the vehicles, either by themselves or with assistance from a crew.

What is occurring at these facilities is not accurately captured by LDC definitions. The Code already has three definitions for Car Washes, and staff has found no need to add a fourth, rather to simplify the definitions to “Car Wash” as a primary use, and “Accessory Car Wash” for those commonly associated with gas stations and convenience stores. This is part of an ongoing effort to update the LDC and make it more user-friendly.

### **Benefit-cost Analysis of the Amendment**

*Who does it help?*

This amendment helps applicants understand what they are applying for when proposing a car wash facility in Polk County.

*Who does it hurt?*

No harm is anticipated with this request. This is a task of editing uses within the Code. Levels of review will remain the same, as will conditions of approval.

*What is the cost?*

No real costs are anticipated with this request. This is a task of editing uses within the Code. Levels of review will remain the same, as will conditions of approval.

### **Limits of the Proposed Ordinance**

This amendment applies to non-residential parcels within the unincorporated areas of the County that allow Car Washes. This includes the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern. The US 27 and North Ridge SAPs currently allow Incidental Car Washes within land use districts located in the ACSC. No car wash uses are currently allowed in the Chapter 5 Use Table; however, with this amendment, gas stations in the Polk City Special Protection Area (SPA) could have an accessory car wash in a handful of Future Land Use districts, if the proposed conditions for approval are met. This would also be true for gas stations in the Rural SPA and Commercial Enclave future land use districts. Ultimately, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is the regulatory agency that permits and oversees car washes.

The Department of Commerce requires a 45-day review on all policy changes affecting development in the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern regardless of whether it has a direct relationship to the primary purpose of the Critical Area, which is aquifer recharge and protection. Therefore, this request will be reviewed by the state prior to becoming effective.

**Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan & Land Development Code**

The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code. The Comprehensive Plan and LDC allow for car washes in most commercial future land use districts, as well as in Business Park and Industrial districts in certain Selected Area Plans (SAPs).

**Comments from Other Agencies:** This text amendment was reviewed by members of the Development Review Committee without further comment.

**Draft Ordinance:** Under separate attachment