Featured Tool: Parking Reductions

Reducing parking standards can help prevent excessive parking requirements that add to the cost of housing. Jurisdictions can better match residential parking standards with parking demand by studying neighborhood and resident characteristics, transit access and mobility. Once a balance is struck between standards and parking needs, maximum parking standards may be enacted to eliminate development of excessive parking.

What issues do parking requirement reductions address?

Parking requirement reductions contribute to housing affordability and encourage the use of alternative transportation modes.

Reducing Unneeded Parking.
- Lower-income, senior and non-traditional single-family development households have lower rates of car ownership. Requiring more parking than necessary increases the cost of construction and reduces housing affordability.
- Excessive parking takes up land and space that could otherwise be used for more housing or other development.

Encouraging Non-Auto Modes.
- Requiring excessive parking tacitly encourages auto-dependence.
- Requiring less parking promotes transit and non-motorized travel.

Where is a reduction in parking requirements most applicable?

Because the American urban landscape is still largely dependent on automobiles, reducing parking requirements is most applicable in areas or districts that have good transit accessibility and offer amenities within walking/biking distance.

- Some larger jurisdictions with higher densities, compact form and lower rates of auto ownership are able incorporate a reduction in parking requirements in more neighborhoods or districts.
- In smaller jurisdictions, reduced parking requirements may be more appropriate in downtown locations or business districts where space is at a premium, congestion is most severe, more transit options are available, and the community wants to foment a lively pedestrian atmosphere.

Parking reductions can be applicable to both attached and detached housing types making it a versatile tool to use in different markets.

What do I need to know about reducing parking requirements?

Many Americans are highly dependent on the automobile for mobility. For that reason, development regulations throughout the United States have generally required from one to three parking spaces per housing unit, regardless of household profile or the availability of on-street parking. Arguments against reduced parking requirements can generally be addressed with strategies that emphasize urban sustainability goals.

- **Fear of congestion.** Opponents may say that reduced parking will increase traffic congestion in neighborhoods because residents will be driving around endlessly in search of parking. On the contrary, new housing
developments with reduced parking requirements are likely to attract families that do not have as a high a need for automobile use. In addition, most of these developments are likely to be placed along a transit corridor, further decreasing the potential need for a car.

- **Lack of parking.** Related to congestion fears, another argument supposes that reducing requirements will make on-street parking harder to find. Reduced parking does not mean that a new development will not have parking; it means it will be reduced based on assessed need (e.g., such as by number of bedrooms) and take different forms, including tandem stalls, shared spaces or first-come access parking. In addition, new developments with reduced parking requirements will be implemented in already dense areas with more transit options. Local governments can incorporate residential parking permit programs to ensure residents can access on-street parking.

- **Safety Concerns.** Individuals that will eventually live in a housing complex with limited parking might also argue that having to park on the street and walk a few blocks exposes them to potential crime. Although there is no specific correlation between the distance from a parked car to a home and crime, there is a correlation between the number of people on the street and a reduction of crime. When a street is more active with increased pedestrians walking to and from transit, parked cars, or corner stores, there are more people to watch and report criminal activity.

- **Financing Obstacles.** Opponents may argue that reducing parking will also make it difficult for developers to find appropriate financing for a project. Looking closely at the numbers and potential profit, developers would have sufficient information to convince banks to finance. A reduction in parking means lower building expenses for floor area that typically has no profit. Instead, the developer will have increased space to build additional housing and retail spaces to rent or sell at additional profit.

## Steps to Revising Parking Requirements

The following planning process is suggested to develop reduced residential parking standards:

- **Determine the Study Area.** Consider the neighborhoods that would benefit from reduced parking standards, especially areas with higher densities, lower rates of auto ownership, districts where space is at a premium, districts where pedestrian activity is promoted, and areas with more transit options.

- **Collect and Analyze Data.** Collect data regarding current parking demand and availability in identified study areas, as well as example parking standards from professional literature, local studies and other similar jurisdictions. Local studies of parking demand at different housing developments could also be beneficial. A comparison of parking standards and requirements in other jurisdictions can inform the discussion of reduced parking standards.

- **Conduct Public Outreach.** In addition to a required public hearing, conduct additional outreach to citizens, housing advocates, developers, transit providers, businesses and others likely to be affected by the ordinance. Workshops and forums are recommended to discuss the supply of parking, parking demand, neighborhood parking concerns and the cost of parking, among other topics. See Citizen Education and Outreach for more on strategies.

- **Determine Standards.** Based on the data collected and public outreach, develop standards for reduced parking, which could be based on:
  - Unit size (e.g., square feet or bedrooms).
  - Distance to transit facilities (e.g., greater reductions for projects within a quarter mile of a transit station).
  - Parking maximums instead of minimums to ensure that parking is not excessive.
  - Unbundling parking from units, \(^1\) which may be more feasible in larger communities with greater transportation options and lower rates of car ownership.

    Other issues to be determined: guest parking, including whether it is included in a project’s parking calculation or part of on-street parking, and enacting a residential neighborhood parking permit program in conjunction with reduced parking standards.

- **Implement the Program.** Reduced parking standards are implemented by adopting an ordinance and applying the new standards during project permit review.

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\(^1\) Based on the idea that parking costs should be unbundled from the cost of housing, goods, and services.
Monitor the Program. Communities can establish a parking monitoring program to evaluate the effectiveness of the new standards in meeting demand and supporting other modes. Such a program could occur on a regular basis to identify vacant off-street or on-street parking and whether parking spills into areas that are not subject to reduced parking standards. Parking standards or management programs, like residential permit parking, can be fine-tuned over time as the program is monitored and residents provide feedback.

Model Policies, Model Regulations, Other Information


Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington: *Parking Demand and Pricing*.

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington: *Example Studies and Plans*.

San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR). *Rethinking Parking*.

Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing. *Parking Requirements for Affordable Housing Developers*.

TRANSFORM (formerly the Transportation and Land Use Coalition). *Housing Shortage/Parking Surplus*.

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, Regulatory Barriers Clearinghouse. *Parking Regulations and Housing Affordability*.