

PARKING

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENT

The “minimum parking requirement,” a regulation created in the 1920s, spurred municipalities to require businesses to provide parking and proceeded to write zoning restrictions to ensure it. Columbus, Ohio was first in 1923, requiring apartment buildings to provide on-site parking. In 1939 Fresno, CA required that hospitals and hotels do the same. This parking trend took off swiftly by the 1950s. In 1946, only 17% of cities had parking requirements; five years later, 71% did.

Continuing this trend, the Institute for Transportation Engineers published a parking generation manual in the 1950s premised on identifying the maximum possible need for parking on a given site. In combination with minimum parking requirements in zoning codes, this has caused municipalities to build more off-street parking than is needed:

- ◆ Downtown Albuquerque, N.M. now devotes more land to parking than all other land uses combined.
- ◆ Half of downtown Buffalo, N.Y. is devoted to parking.



“So this means people who don’t own cars pay for other peoples’ parking. Every time you walk somewhere, or ride a bike, or take bus, you’re getting shafted.” - Donald Shoup

Municipalities that provide plentiful “free” parking may be contributing to:

- ◆ Low density development
- ◆ Discouraging public transit
- ◆ The lack of affordable housing
- ◆ The decline of central business districts
- ◆ Environmental problems including the adverse impacts of storm water runoff and the urban heat island effect

There’s No Such Thing As Free Parking

Parking appears free because its cost is widely dispersed in slightly higher prices for everything else. Ninety six percent of the financial cost of parking is bundled into rents and housing costs, higher prices in stores and myriad other charges.

In 1961, when the city of Oakland, CA started requiring apartments to have one parking space per apartment, housing costs per apartment increased by 18%, and urban density declined by 30%. It’s a pattern that has spread across the country.

“The worst thing that many American cities have done, for low income people, is create a world in which you NEED a car. Parking pushes everything farther apart, and even if you’re too poor to own a car, you have to pay for all the free parking you don’t use.” - Donald Shoup

MANAGING PARKING DIFFERENTLY

Many cities are reconsidering the minimum parking requirement and instead are focused on managing (and reducing) the actual demand for parking. Strategies include:

1. Unbundle the costs of parking from housing - allow developers to rent or sell spaces separately from housing units
2. Create parking in-lieu fees - allow developers to pay a fee in-lieu of providing parking and use fee revenue to provide publically owned parking spaces nearby
3. Encourage or require shared parking - public parking spaces can be shared among different private and/or public uses that have peak parking demands at different times
4. Charge a fair-market price for on-street parking in core commercial areas
5. Create incentives to reduce parking demand and shift the cost of parking from the general public to the users of parking: Encourage employers that offer free parking to compensate employees who don't park with an equal value in transit vouchers or cash. Offer bike parking, bike share and car share programs.
6. Require or encourage all parking garages to be mixed use buildings with active ground floor spaces such as retail. Require that new structured parking be designed for easy conversion to non-parking uses so as the demand for parking declines, garage space can become offices, event venues, housing units, etc.
7. Reduce the impact of surface parking lots through better design, including green infrastructure elements to reduce runoff and heat island impacts
8. Encourage the conversion of surface parking lots to active uses, creating opportunities for jobs and housing, and reducing blight.
9. Municipalities can invest their parking garage and meter fees in community improvement projects, prioritizing quality of life over quantity of parking.

“Get over the notion that people won't go downtown if parking spaces aren't as cheap, abundant or convenient as suburban shopping centers. People go downtown because it offers a vibrant mix of uses in close proximity to one another. Parking lots destroy that proximity, dilute the mix, and waste valuable land that could be used for housing, shops or parks.” - Donald Shoup



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