



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 demand by studying neighborhood and resident characteristics, including existing and planned transit access. Jurisdictions should also consider desired future neighborhood characteristics and mode split. Once a balance is struck between standards and parking needs, maximum parking standards may be enacted to eliminate development of excessive parking.

Background

WHAT ISSUES DO PARKING REQUIREMENT REDUCTIONS ADDRESS?

Parking requirement reductions contribute to housing affordability and encourage the use of alternative transportation modes, potentially reducing vehicle miles traveled and household transportation costs.

Reducing unneeded parking:

- Households with low income, seniors, 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 as these construction costs are paid for by future renters.
- Households closer to transit and with other mobility choices have transportation options that could allow them to decrease the number of trips they take in their cars, leading to a decrease in car ownership.

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

[Housing in Centers and Near Transit](#)

[Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

[Missing Middle Density](#)

Type of Tool

Incentives

Project Type

Single family

Multifamily

Ownership

Rentall

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools

- Excessive parking takes up land and space that could otherwise be used for more housing or other development.
- Many areas currently have too much parking that goes unused for most of the day. The reduction of parking requirements, in addition to policies that promote shared parking between uses, could increase efficiency of existing infrastructure.

Encouraging non-auto modes:

- Requiring excessive parking tacitly encourages and, in some cases, subsidizes auto-dependence.
- Requiring less parking promotes transit and nonmotorized travel.

WHERE IS A REDUCTION IN PARKING REQUIREMENTS MOST APPLICABLE?

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

- Some larger jurisdictions with higher densities, compact form, and lower rates of car ownership can 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 foster a lively pedestrian atmosphere.
- Reduced parking requirements may also be appropriate in senior housing developments where the rate of car ownership among tenants will be lower.
- State law (RCW 36.70A.620) limits the amount of parking local governments may require for low-income, senior, disabled, and market-rate housing units constructed after July 2019 that are located near high-quality transit service.

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 cars 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 households that do not have as high of 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 concern is 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 existing and future residents' parking needs are met.
- **Safety Concerns.** Individuals who will eventually live in a housing complex with limited parking might worry 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 more 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 cost of development, potential profit, and existing examples in the region, developers should have sufficient information to convince banks to finance. Parking is expensive to build and is captured in higher costs of housing for both owners and renters. Additionally, above-ground parking occupies valuable space that could be used for different uses. A reduction in parking means lower building expenses for floor area that typically has no profit. Instead, the developer will have more space to build additional housing and retail spaces to rent or sell.

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 and lower rates of car ownership. Other candidates are districts where space is at a premium, and areas with more pedestrian activity and 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, reach out to community members, 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 [Build Community Support](#) 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 units¹, which may be more feasible in larger communities with more 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.
- **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.

¹ Based on the idea that parking costs should be unbundled from the cost of housing, goods, and services.



MODEL POLICIES, REGULATIONS AND PLANS

City of Auburn: [Comprehensive Downtown Parking Management Plan \(CDPMP\)](#) (2014)

City of Seattle: [Ordinance 125558 – Neighborhood Parking](#) (2020)

City of Tacoma: [Reduced Parking Area](#) (RPA) (2014)

City of Vancouver: [Zoning Code Ch. 20.550 – Transit Overlay District](#) (2020)

OTHER INFORMATION

Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC): [Flexible Parking Requirements](#) (2020)

Capitol Hill EcoDistrict: [Shared Parking](#) (2018)

King County Metro: [Right Size Parking](#) (2020)

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC): [Parking Demand and Pricing](#) (2019)

San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR): [Reducing Housing Costs by Rethinking Parking Requirements](#) (2006)

Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing. [Parking Requirements Guide for Affordable Housing Developers](#) (2004)

Victoria Transport Policy Institute: [Parking Requirements, Impacts on Housing Affordability](#) (2020)

Victoria Transport Policy Institute: [The Trouble with Minimum Parking Requirements](#) (1999)

