

MODERNIZING PARKING REQUIREMENTS

Background &
Peer Cities Report

April 2025



DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY

Modernizing Parking Requirements

Background & Peer Cities Report

The Modernizing Parking Requirements text amendment is sponsored by Denver City Council members Sarah Parady, Chris Hinds, Flor Alvidrez, and Darrell Watson, in partnership with Denver's Department of Community Planning and Development (CPD), Department of Transportation & Infrastructure (DOTI), and the Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency (CASR). The proposed amendment would remove minimum parking requirements from Denver's zoning code.

This report provides an overview of the current parking situation in Denver and background information for the public and decision makers to better understand the proposal.



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Introduction

Denver is pursuing the Modernizing Parking Requirements project in an effort to:

- Promote the development of more housing;
- Provide flexibility for development to include the number of parking spaces necessary based on market conditions; and
- Streamline zoning regulations for efficiency and clarity.

The project proposes to remove minimum parking requirements from development regulations, which now require a minimum number of parking spaces based on the proposed use and zone district. For example, market-rate apartments typically require one parking space per dwelling unit while restaurants typically require nearly four parking spaces per every 1,000 square feet of indoor space. Currently, minimum parking ratios don't apply to single-unit homes, accessory dwelling units, or certain neighborhoods in and around downtown. In addition, some affordable housing developments already have reduced parking requirements.

While some developers provide the minimum amount of parking required, many build more parking than is required to ensure their projects are competitive. A downtown office building recently built at 1901 Lawrence Street provides 633 parking spaces, yet zero were required. An apartment complex with 470 units at 1145 S. Broadway provides 691 parking spaces, compared to 428 that were required, even though it's located one-half mile from two light rail stations.

Providing parking is expensive and can raise housing prices. For example, each structured parking space costs as much as \$50,000, which pushes up rent and housing prices even for people who don't own a car. Fewer housing units are built because space that could be used for housing is instead used for parking. Additionally, parking contributes to a reliance on cars as a means of transportation, more traffic congestion and air pollution, and administrative burden for both the city and applicants.

"Making Denver more affordable for all Denverites means breaking down barriers and making it easier to build housing in our city. This is a market-based solution that will help deliver our goal of a Denver that is truly affordable for working families without impacting parking needs for our residents."

- Mayor Mike Johnston

By removing minimum parking requirements, the city is prioritizing building more housing and less parking, particularly in transit-rich areas, which could lower housing costs overall. The city also anticipates reducing the amount of time staff spend annually on parking administration by hundreds of hours. Applicants will also no longer have to spend time calculating whether they meet complicated parking requirements that can include exceptions, alternatives, and reductions.

If successful, the Modernizing Parking Requirements project will help Denver join dozens of cities across the country that have removed parking requirements and experienced an increase in housing construction. Planners from our peer cities who have successfully enacted parking reforms do not have regrets or words of caution. Developments continue to provide parking, although sometimes less, where parking is not as necessary.

"When given the option to maximize housing projects for actual housing instead of parking, buildings ultimately get more homes, become more financially feasible, and have a better chance of actually getting built. The research unveils a simple yet powerful truth: to unlock more homes for all our neighbors, the most effective policy is simply to allow less pavement" (Gould, 2024).

Parking in Denver

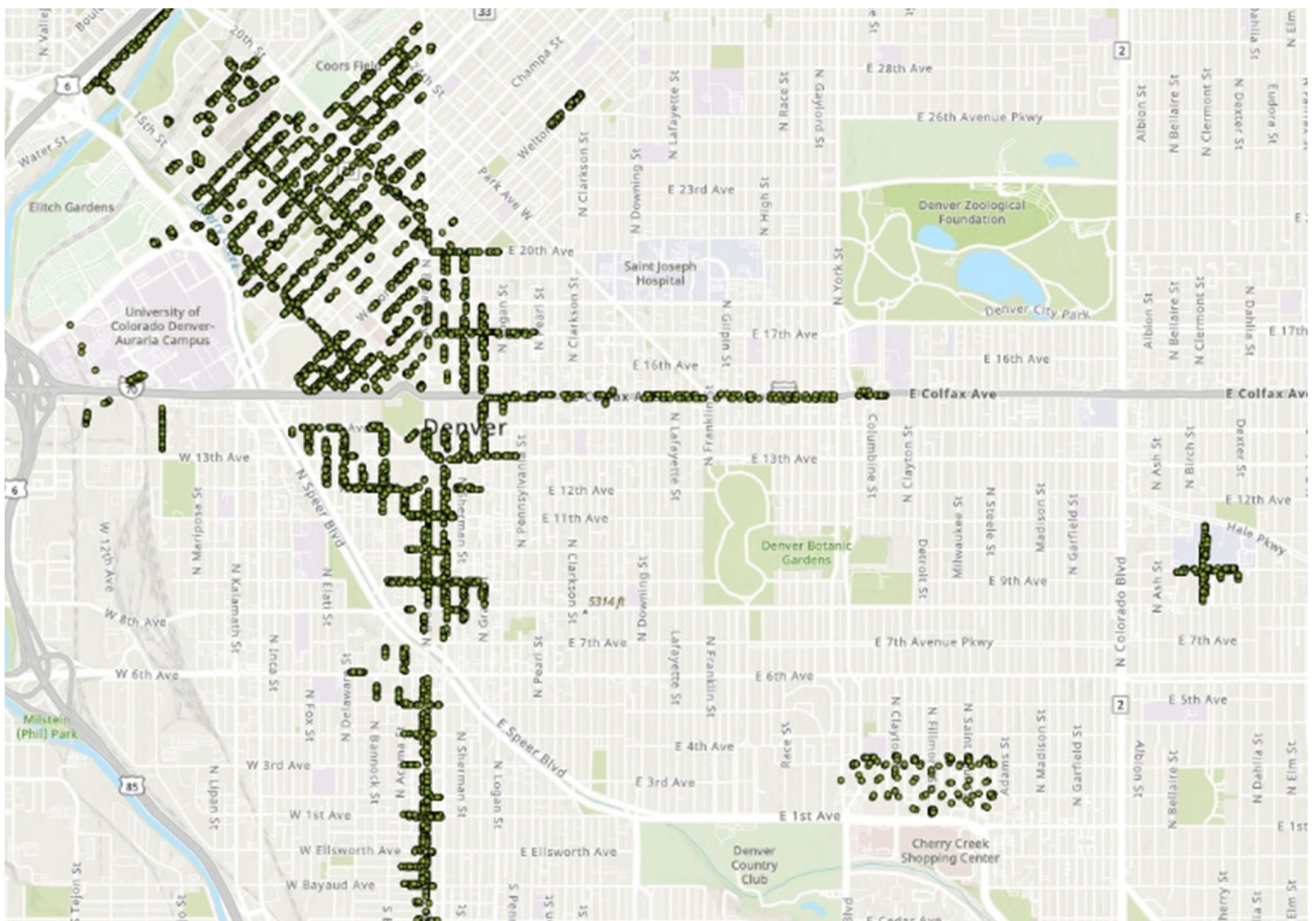
Since cars became a significant form of transportation, parking has greatly shaped how Denver looks and feels. While some parking is public, most serves private development. Modernizing Parking Requirements focuses on zoning requirements for parking in private development.

Parking options in Denver include private and public lots and garages (off-street parking) and public on-street parking. The city owns seven DOTI-managed surface parking lots in the downtown area and two public garages, including the Cultural Center Complex Garage and the Denver Justice Center Parking Garage. The public Arts Complex Garage is managed by Denver's Arts and Venues Department.

These facilities are generally open 24/7 and include Electric Vehicle (EV) charging.

Public on-street parking is available throughout the city. City-operated, metered parking primarily exists in the central core of the city, south along Broadway, east along Colfax Avenue, and within a few other mixed-use areas and shopping districts. The map below shows the location of the parking meters in the central part of the city. None of these facilities are affected by this project.

The minimum parking requirements in the zoning code primarily impact private property when a new land use or change of occupancy is proposed. The amount of parking and the design of the proposed parking lot or garage are reviewed by CPD.



Parking meter locations in central Denver.

Land Area Devoted to Parking

A significant amount of Denver's land is devoted to parking. The [DenverInfill Blog](#) published this map of the land devoted to parking lots and single use garages in the downtown area. The blog noted that about 237 acres (or about 145 acres not counting the parking lots west of Speer Blvd.) of the downtown area is devoted to parking (Keeney, 2026).



Land Devoted to Parking Downtown (Keeney, 2016)

Recent Parking Trends in Denver

City data show that new parking will be built for city residents or businesses even when minimum parking requirements are removed. In fact, many projects already choose to provide more parking than what zoning requires.

Denver staff analyzed zoning permit records from 2019 to 2024 to review recent parking trends. Parking requirements were reviewed for new land uses, building additions, and occupancy changes. These records indicate that applicants often provide more parking than required.

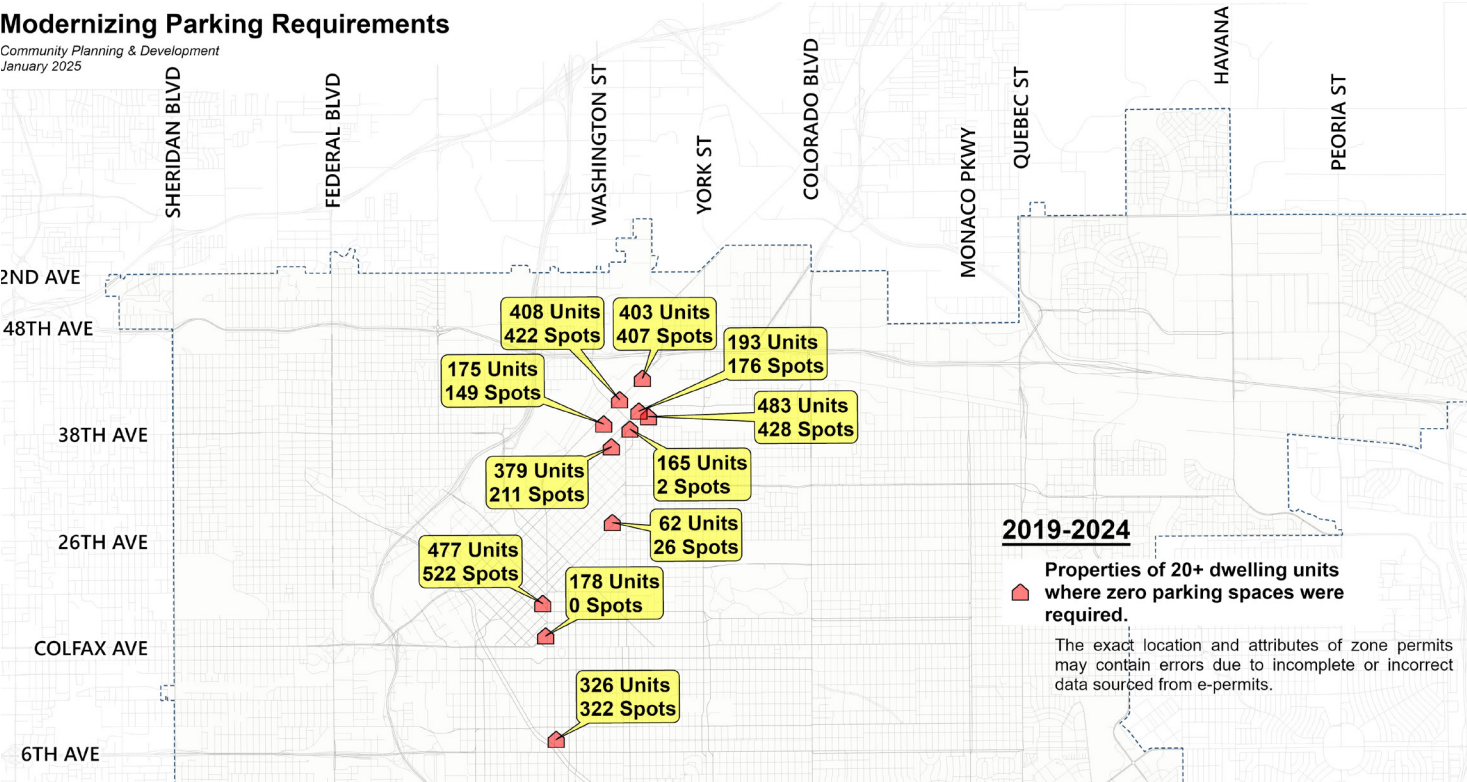
Residential and Mixed-Use Projects with 20 Dwelling Units or More

There were 11 zoning permits for properties with 20 or more dwelling units where no parking was required. Only one of these projects provided no parking. The remaining 10 projects provided 2,665 parking spaces in total, with six projects providing over 200 parking spaces each.

Parking was required for the remaining 70 zoning permits for projects with 20 or more dwelling units (8,507 dwelling units in total). The number of parking spaces required for these projects ranged from 5 to 738 parking spaces, and 9,360 parking spaces in total were provided. Nearly 30% of these projects provided at least 25% more parking spaces than were required. Eight projects (or 12%) provided more than double the required number of parking spaces.

Modernizing Parking Requirements

Community Planning & Development
January 2025



Number of parking spaces provided for development projects from 2019-2024 where parking was not required due to zone district requirements or use of parking exceptions (Denver e-permits data).

Commercial Projects with No Residential

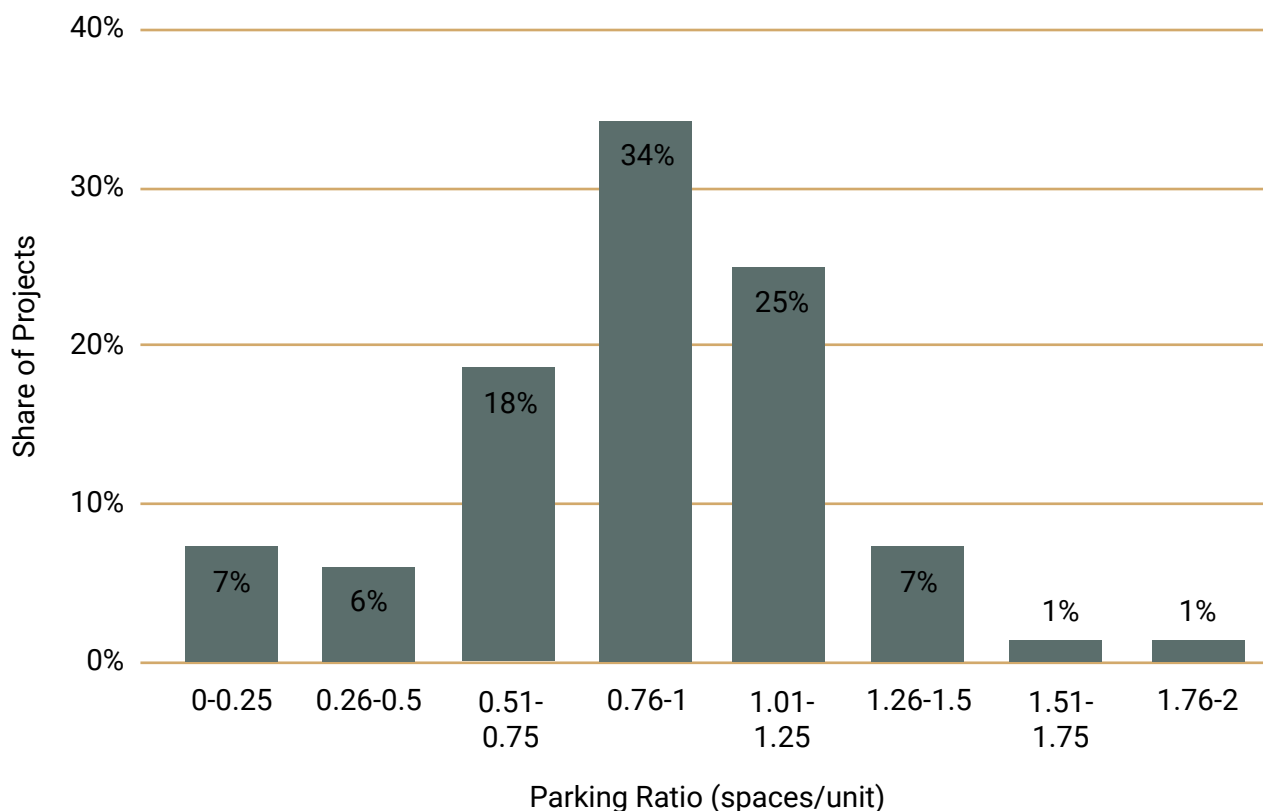
There were 1,865 zoning permits for commercial projects. Due to not meeting thresholds, parking was not required by zoning for nearly 53% of these projects. Nonetheless, 153 of these projects provided parking anyway. These 153 projects provided a total of 33,134 parking spaces that were not required by zoning.

Residential and Mixed-Use Developments 2020-2022

The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEET) analyzed Denver development data compiled by DenverInfill and found that it's uncommon for developments to not provide any parking, even when parking is not required. The graph below displays the parking ratios of 119 completed and proposed residential and mixed-use projects from 2020-2022 that had no parking requirements. Nearly 35% of all projects provided or proposed more than one parking space per residential unit.

"Parking isn't going to disappear, several developers and housing experts told The Denver Post, even if the city tells developers they don't need to provide a specific number of spots. The lenders who finance apartment projects typically require a ratio of parking spots to units, no matter what the local government mandates, because parking makes it easier to find tenants."

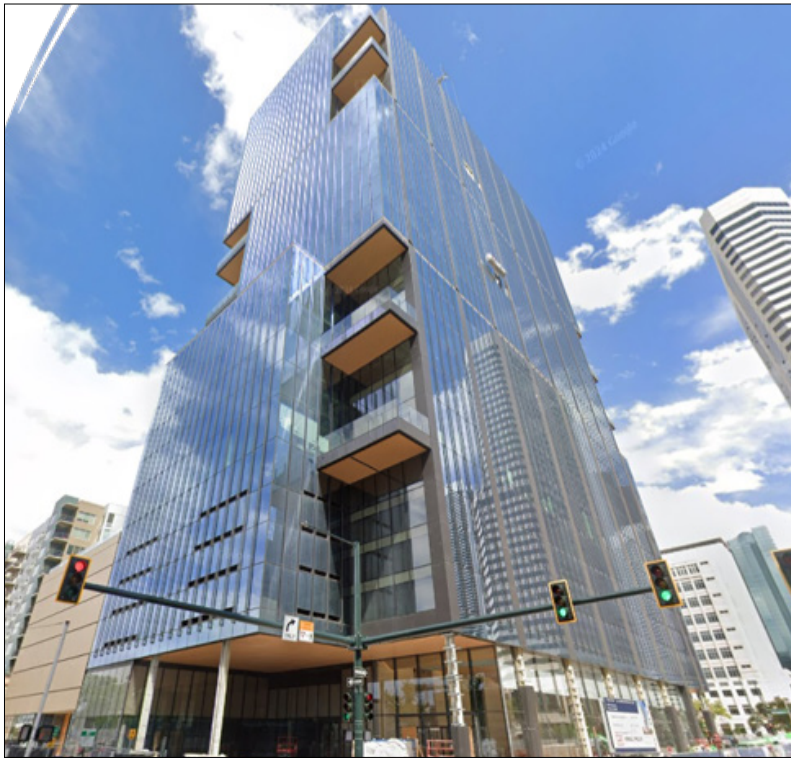
- Seth Klamann of The Denver Post



Examples of Recent Projects in Denver

100 Cook Street

- Zone District: C-MX-5
- Office Building
- 136 parking spaces required
- 216 parking spaces provided



1901 Lawrence Street

- Zone District: D-C
- Office Building
- 0 parking spaces required
- 216 parking spaces provided
- D-C zone district does not have a minimum parking requirement

600 Park Avenue

- Zone District: D-AS-12+
- 230 dwelling units
- 0 parking spaces required
- 217 parking spaces provided
- D-AS-12+ zone district does not have a minimum parking requirement



1145 S. Broadway

- Zone District: T-MU-30
- 470 dwelling units
- 428 parking spaces required
- 691 parking spaces provided
- Within 1/2 mile of two light rail stations



Examples of Recent Projects in Denver

1445 16th Street

- Zone District: D-LD
- 225 dwelling units with office, retail, and restaurant
- 321 parking space required
- 321 parking spaces provided
- Shared parking reduction



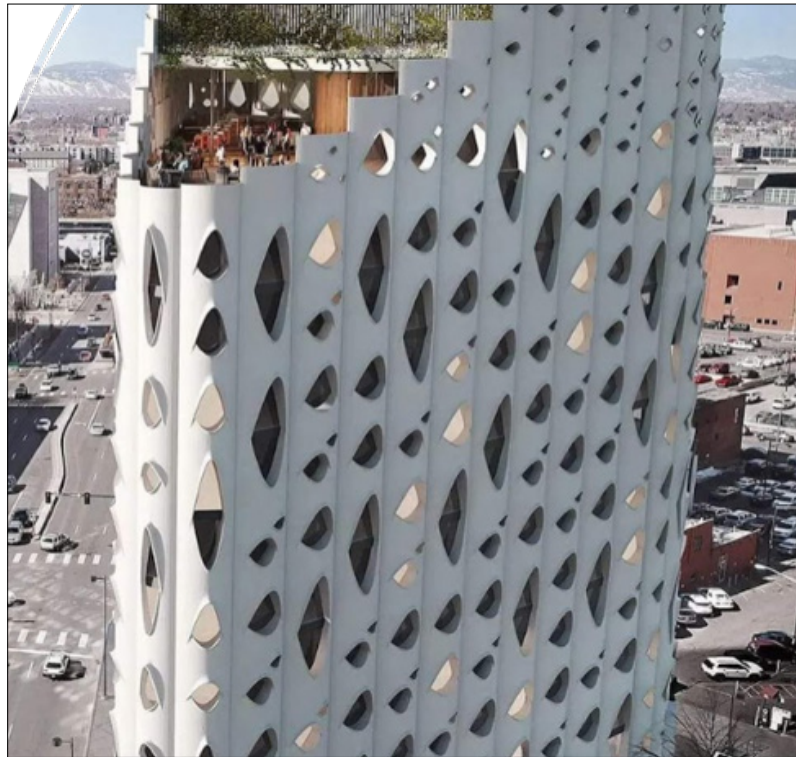
221 N. Federal Boulevard

- Zone District: E-MX-3, UO-1, UO-2
- 60 dwelling units
- 6 parking spaces required
- 11 parking spaces provided
- Alternative parking ratio: 0.1 space per unit affordable at 60% of Area Median Income (AMI) or less



240 14th Street Populus

- Zone District: D-C, UO-1
- Hotel with 265 rooms & restaurants
- 0 parking space required
- 0 parking spaces provided
- D-C zone district does not have a minimum parking requirement



3354 Larimer Street

- Zone District: I-MX-3, UO-2, DO-7
- Residential hotel with 23 rooms, retail, and restaurant
- 0 parking spaces required
- 0 parking spaces provided
- Parking exemption: 1/2 mile from rail station (DO-7 overlay)

Supportive Plan Policies

There are several city policies that support removing parking mandates. Land use, transportation, and climate action plans developed by CPD, DOTI, and CASR provide policies, strategies, and recommendations consistent with the Modernizing Parking Requirements text amendment. These plans were created with community engagement and collaboration with other city agencies, community partners, and city officials. Current parking mandates work against several of these goals that envision a walkable, bikeable, accessible and transit friendly Denver. “Separated land use, low density, and ample free parking create drivable cities but prevent walkable neighborhoods” (Shoup, 2020). Requiring off-street parking is an incentive for Denverites to keep driving and it keeps the cost of construction higher than it need be.

Comprehensive Plan 2040

Comprehensive Plan 2040 is the long-range vision guiding the future of Denver and consists of six vision elements. Three of these vision elements, including Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods; Connected Safe and Accessible Places; and Healthy and Active are described as being walkable, bikeable, accessible and transit friendly. The Connected, Safe and Accessible Places vision element also includes a goal to advance innovative curb lane management and parking policies. Removing parking mandates is an innovate approach many cities across the country are implementing to discourage the auto-orientation of many communities in an effort to promote multimodal transportation.

Blueprint Denver

Blueprint Denver was adopted in 2019 as a supplement to Comprehensive Plan 2040 and establishes an integrated framework for the city’s land use and transportation decisions. Removing parking mandates supports several of the plan’s policies by modernizing zoning regulations, adding flexibility to redevelopment of institutional sites, prioritizing pedestrians over vehicles, and promoting walkability.

Land Use and Building Form: General

- Policy 3: Ensure the Denver Zoning Code continues to respond to the needs of the city, while remaining modern and flexible. (pg. 72)
- Policy 6: Implement zoning code revisions to facilitate compatible redevelopment of institutional sites within neighborhoods. (pg. 75)

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2040
DENVER'S PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



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Land Use and Building Form: Design Quality & Preservation

Policy 4: Ensure an active and pedestrian friendly environment that provides a true mixed-use character in centers and corridors. (pg. 103)

Mobility

- Policy 2: Align the impacts of private development with transportation infrastructure and promote development that creates walkable, transit-friendly communities. (pg. 108)
- Policy 3: On all streets, prioritize people walking and rolling over other modes of transportation. (pg. 109)

Quality-of-Life Infrastructure

Policy 4: Promote environmentally friendly development strategies in the public and private realms. (pg. 120)

Small Area Plans

Most of the city's neighborhoods are covered by small area plans that provide more specific guidance than Comprehensive Plan 2040 and Blueprint Denver. Two of these plans in particular recommend reevaluating the city's current parking requirements.

The East Central Area Plan recommends the city "reduce regulatory barriers to make it easier to build affordable housing, reuse existing buildings, and develop lower-scale buildings on small lots" along Colfax. Strategies to achieve this goal include "eliminate parking requirements for older structures more than 50 years old" and "evaluate parking requirements and reduce or eliminate if found to be restricting socially equitable development, affordable housing, historic preservation, are requiring more than needed due to changing mobility trends, or are contributing to unsafe pedestrian and bicycle conditions. Coordinate street parking management program with any parking reduction to mitigate impacts on adjacent neighborhoods" (pg. 257).

The West Area Plan includes a policy to "support existing commercial areas by promoting community-desired uses and enhancing the physical environment to create quality gathering places for residents." One of the strategies to achieve this goal says to "consolidate and establish more efficient off-street parking systems through shared parking agreements/easements and through transportation demand management solutions that include micro-transit alternatives and mobility hubs" (pg. 170).

The West Area Plan includes a policy that says "consistent with adopted citywide policies in Blueprint Denver and in coordination with citywide efforts, direct future growth along high-capacity transit corridors and centers, and ensure future development results in neighborhoods that are more complete with mobility, quality of life enhancements, and access to opportunities for all residents." One of the strategies to achieve this goal says to "establish a maximum number of off-street vehicle parking spaces that can be constructed on a site, or eliminate off-street vehicle parking requirements altogether" (pg. 178).

In addition, the "West Area impervious surface coverage of 53% is high in comparison to the Denver average of 48%. The coverage is concentrated in large industrial areas, non-residential areas, major corridors, and surface parking" (pg. 43). Impervious surfaces contribute to increased stormwater runoff, poor water quality, and warmer temperatures, and these surfaces are expected to cover more land in the future.

Removing parking mandates, combined with DOTI's Curbside Area Management Plans and Transportation Demand Management program, help implement these plans by allowing, rather than requiring, a sufficient parking supply that makes it easier to build housing while supporting today's mobility trends and slowing the growth of impervious surfaces.

Denver Moves Everyone 2050

Denver Moves Everyone 2050 is a citywide transportation plan aimed at moving everyone and everything equitably, safely, and sustainably. According to the plan, "parking covers 12 square miles of Denver, yet much of it is underutilized". Removing parking mandates could help reduce impervious surface (which contributes to heat island effects) while implementing the following plan recommendations:

- Support land-use development and policies that reduce the need for personal-vehicle trips such as increasing density around centers and corridors and establishing parking maximums and removing parking minimums.
- Encourage transit-oriented development near future BRT stations that minimizes off-street parking.

Background information, the final plan, and resources are available at <https://denvermoveseveryone.com>.



Curbside Action Plan

The citywide Curbside Action Plan was published in March 2024 by DOTI. This action-oriented plan complements Denver Moves Everyone, and provides a framework for making curbside use and management decisions by street type to support city transportation and mobility goals. The plan provides guidance for curb uses, curbside and parking toolkit, and curbside TDM strategies. This can be used proactively, when conducting studies or considering developments, or reactively to address a specific situation. The modal hierarchy within the plan informs the described curbside functions and priorities: people first, single occupancy vehicle trips are last.

Denver Climate Action 2020 Recommendations Report

Denver's Climate Action Task Force, a group of community leaders and local experts on greenhouse gas emissions, provided recommendations on transportation and land use. Their report proposes an overarching strategy to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions in ways that can improve housing affordability. The report recommends eliminating minimum parking requirements or otherwise incentivizing developers to build less parking. The report also includes other strategies and potential fees for Denver to consider to help offset the climate impacts of driving.



"By eliminating parking minimums, we can take a significant step towards fulfilling Denverites' demands for sustainability and affordability. Cars and trucks are the leading contributors to air pollution in our city. This move allows the community to determine the number of parking spaces necessary, helping us cultivate more walkable neighborhoods and increase transportation choices."

- Elizabeth Babcock, Executive Director
of
Denver's Office of Climate Action,
Sustainability and Resiliency

Current Regulations and Programs

History of Parking Mandates

Denver began regulating the amount of parking provided for new developments in 1956, when regulations for off-street parking were introduced. Records show these requirements were repealed in 1960 and then re-established in 1967. This came at a time when, “The highway system and rapid development of the suburbs after WWII brought about a distinct shift in Denver’s wealthier population, pulling them away from the central city and toward the suburbs” (DOTI, 2022). Denver’s former approach to parking regulations is embodied in the city’s Former Chapter 59 zone districts, which still apply to approximately 19.5% of the city (excluding Denver International Airport zoning). Article VI of Former Chapter 59 is dedicated to off-street parking requirements. Land uses in this section are categorized into 10 different parking classes, each with a different parking standard. The required off-street parking requirements are mostly based upon the gross square footage of the structures associated with a land use parking class. There are also requirements based upon the number of classrooms, teachers, employees, and student capacity. For some parking classes there is a required parking area size, set as a fraction of the gross square footage of the structures, not just a minimum number of parking stalls.

During the creation of the Denver Zoning Code, the city’s Public Works department (now DOTI) was also working on a Strategic Parking Plan (SPP) to evaluate the city’s approach to parking management. This plan was used to guide the current approach to parking regulations which is organized by land use and varies by neighborhood context. “The SPP explores innovative strategies and parking values from a variety of user perspectives so that the implementation tools set forth can achieve the best balance possible” (pg. 2). The Curbside Action Plan, described above, is an update and modernization of the SPP. In addition, in recent years, the city made targeted changes to parking requirements in the Denver Zoning Code. For example, maximum parking standards were established for the Downtown - Central Platte Valley zone districts and parking reductions were created for affordable housing.

Denver Zoning Code

Summary of Existing Parking Ratios

In the Denver Zoning Code, minimum parking requirements are assigned to each land use and vary based upon the neighborhood context. The vehicle parking requirements are greatest in the suburban zone districts and generally taper down by context and into the downtown core, where the city has historically never required parking. There is not always a variation in the requirements between each context. All zone districts within a given context, whether it’s a single-unit or main street district, have the same parking requirement for an individual land use. Additionally, there are maximum vehicle surface parking ratios for areas within one-quarter mile of rail transit stations, set at 110% of the minimum parking requirements in the zone district where the development is located (with the exception that one parking space per dwelling unit would still be allowed). The Downtown-Central Platte Valley (D-CPV) zone districts, added to the Denver Zoning Code in 2018, also have maximum parking standards.

Summary of Parking Exceptions

Section 10.4.5 of the Denver Zoning Code is dedicated to vehicle parking exceptions. This section contains several vehicle parking exemptions, alternative minimum parking ratios, parking reductions, and standards for shared parking that offer relief from the baseline minimum parking requirements in order to encourage development that meets other city objectives. Exemptions are possible for pre-existing small zone lots, ground-floor retail uses in mixed use projects, historic structures, to preserve existing trees, and enhanced affordable housing near multi-modal transportation. Alternative parking ratios, which can be combined with other alternatives ratios but not combined with a parking reduction, are allowed for affordable housing, small dwelling units, shelters, congregate living, household living for older adults, and other housing. Reductions are possible for assisted

living facilities, proximity to multi-modal transportation, on- or off-site car sharing, and bike sharing. Lastly, this section contains standards and a review process for a shared parking analysis for mixed use developments or multiple uses that are located near one another (with different parking demands). Determining the parking exceptions applicable to any given project is complicated and time-consuming for city staff and customers.

Staff Time Administering Parking Regulations

The total amount of staff time administering parking regulations for Community Planning and Development is estimated to be 654 hours annually. This includes time from the three main Development Services work groups (Commercial Zoning, Residential, and Site Design and Neighborhood Development) who process and review questions from the public related to parking, zoning permits, and site development plans. The time spent on administering parking reviews costs the city approximately \$25,340 annually, using an average salary for the Associate City Planner position.

“This Modernizing Parking Requirements project is another example of how we continue to reduce permit review times and streamline our regulations to better serve Denver residents and businesses. This fix would allow our staff and residents to focus on project priorities instead of spending hundreds of hours reviewing complicated parking regulations. This gives residents more flexibility while still providing the parking Denverites need.”

- Manish Kumar, Executive Director of Community Planning and Development

Impact of Parking Requirements on Current and Recent Development

Existing minimum parking requirements can be a barrier to providing more housing units in new developments or converting existing buildings to new uses. The following examples shed light on how parking regulations and site constraints can delay development approval.

2001 Chestnut Place

This is a mixed-use project with 76 dwelling units and approximately 2,000 sf of ground-floor retail. The applicants were in the review process from 2018 to 2023 while they sought a site willing to give them an off-site parking agreement.

3001 Walnut Street

This is an adaptive reuse project that was conceived in 2022 and stalled due to a lack of parking for a restaurant expansion. The site is about one block outside the limits of the 38th & Blake station area where no parking is required. Due to recent zoning code updates that added parking exceptions for floor area expansions and increased flexibility for parking area improvements, the project can now move forward.

2650 Welton Street

This is the former Rossonian Hotel where a new hotel addition is proposed on a vacant historic building. Because of site constraints, after using every option available through the DZC to reduce the minimum parking requirement, compliance with current parking regulations would still require two separate off-site parking agreements with neighboring properties plus an on-site car share agreement.

1393 N. Meade Street

This project currently proposes 140 dwelling units. If the Modernizing Parking Requirements project is approved, the applicant would consider removing a floor of parking from each building and replace those parking spaces with approximately 45 additional dwelling units.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

The city is also administers a Development Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Ordinance that requires new development to implement strategies that reduce parking demand from single-occupancy vehicles while providing and encouraging other transportation options. The TDM requirements help ensure that residents, employees, and visitors still have transportation options to access new developments and help to minimize their vehicular parking demand through such programs as offering subsidized transit passes and supporting car share opportunities.

Curbside Area Management Plans

DOTI's Curbside & Parking team has tools that are used to assess and manage on-street parking impacts, including the Residential Parking Permit and Curbside Area Management Plan programs that comprehensively consider who is generating the demand for on-street parking and who is using that parking in a given area (residents, patrons, etc.). Curbside Area Management Plans result in the introduction (and modification) of various parking/curbside restrictions through the installation of parking signs.

Residential Parking Permit Program

Denver's Residential Parking Permit (RPP) Program is designed to improve resident parking access to their primary residence in areas near commercial, industrial, institutional, or event-based land uses. DOTI establishes RPP Zones in neighborhoods and issues RPPs to manage the public right-of-way more efficiently. RPP Zones are one of the tools available to manage parking demand in residential areas. The permit exempts a resident or guest vehicle from the posted, on-street parking time limit restrictions ONLY in a designated Block or Area Zone. RPP Zones are typically implemented through a Curbside Area Management Plan.

Types of RPPs include:

- Vehicle Specific Parking Permit (VSPP): Associated with a vehicle license plate registered at an eligible Denver address and issued annually.
- Flex Parking Permit (FPP): A physical hang tag issued annually to an eligible City and County of Denver address. Designed for vehicle parking for resident guests, service providers, or resident vehicles. Only one Flex Parking Permit can be active at an address at any given time.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards

The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design contain the current federal ADA parking standards. The number of ADA compliant parking spaces is determined based upon the total amount provided at a parking facility. "The term "parking facility" is used instead of the term "parking lot" so that it is clear that both parking lots and parking structures are required to comply. The number of parking spaces required to be accessible is to be calculated separately for each parking facility; the required number is not to be based on the total number of parking spaces provided in all of the parking facilities provided on the site" (U.S. DOJ, 2010). Removing minimum parking requirements from local zoning law does not change how these federal standards are administered.

State Law

By removing parking mandates, Denver will comply with state legislation (HB24-1304) passed in 2024 that requires municipalities to stop enforcing minimum parking requirements for multifamily residential development and adaptive reuse of buildings that will be at least 50% residential, if they are within a quarter-mile of most transit routes, which applies to most of the city. Denver and other cities must comply with this legislation by June 30, 2025.

How Our Proposal Differs

Minimum compliance with state law would add complexity to already-complicated parking requirements and take more staff time to review proposed developments as staff would have to consider the proximity of many residential projects to existing and planned transit routes with a minimum level of frequency, while still requiring minimum parking requirements for residential projects that aren't within a quarter-mile of such transit.

Therefore, the Modernizing Parking Requirements project proposes to go further than the requirements of state law and applies to all land uses in all zone districts citywide. This approach simplifies our parking regulations and allows the non-residential business community to benefit from the provided flexibility, in line with best practices in parking reform.



The City of Boulder has launched a project to explore eliminating the minimum off-street parking requirements partly in response to recent changes to state law.

“From giving Coloradans more freedom to build Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on their property thanks to the work of Senators Amabile, Exum, Mullica, and Representative Weinberg, to expanding housing near transit and job centers tackled by Representative Woodrow, and Senators Jodeh, and Winter, eliminating discriminatory occupancy limits passed by Representative Rutinel and Senator Gonzales, and getting rid of parking requirements above and beyond what people want or need thanks to the work of Representative Woodrow and Senator Hinrichsen.

With these policies, we are making it easier to build housing supply that's inherently affordable and filling critical gaps in communities where the needs are greatest to help power our economy.

In Colorado, we say “Yes!” to more housing! “Yes” to unlocking prosperity! “Yes” to opportunity for Coloradans at every budget!

To narrow the gap between supply and demand, we must continue to expand choices, speed up timelines, and reduce costs for new housing to come on the market.” (CO Newsline, 2025)”

- Colorado Governor Jared Polis, State of the State Address, 2025

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Austin, TX

In November of 2023, Austin eliminated minimum parking requirements for new development. Austin city staff found that current parking requirements contributed to high cost of housing, encouraged driving, and worked against city goals for additional housing and sustainable transportation options.

Austin staff said their earlier experience with removing downtown parking requirements showed that parking would still be provided for new housing and other development. In addition, planners were able to demonstrate Austin's Transportation Demand Management toolkit, including curbside management, parking demand management, and a new street impact fee program, has encouraged developers to re-evaluate the amount of parking included in developments.

Austin's housing crisis influenced the city's parking conversation. Prior to removing minimum parking requirements altogether, Austin waived parking requirements for some affordable housing developments. Eligible projects generally provided 25% fewer spaces than were previously required, which reduced overall development cost.

Based on feedback from disability advocacy groups, Austin took a unique approach to accessible parking. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires provision of accessible parking spaces as a percentage of all parking provided. However, Austin generally requires on-site accessible parking even when no other parking is provided, with some exceptions for off-site and on-street accessible parking.



Austin's current rail transit system is much smaller than Denver's, but a major expansion is planned.

Since eliminating parking requirements, Austin has found success with new development improving walkability and encouraging alternative transportation, with more bike parking and bike share stations. Austin's current rail transit system is much smaller than Denver's, but a major expansion is planned. City staff hope that removing parking requirements will allow new development to maximize future transit investments.

Early results show that housing developers are taking advantage of parking reforms and reducing the amount of parking provided, with multi-unit developments providing around 35% lower parking than before. City leaders are now looking to go a step further and implement parking maximums, with parking reform seen as the first step to a more affordable and sustainable future.

Minneapolis, MN

In May of 2021, Minneapolis eliminated off-street parking requirements citywide, and deferred to the state building code for accessible parking requirements. This was the culmination of a 25-year process to incrementally reform parking regulations, including removing downtown parking requirements, reducing requirements in transit station areas, creating citywide maximums parking requirements, and eliminating parking requirements for medium-scale housing in transit corridors. Minneapolis's incremental approach provided the groundwork for Minneapolis Comp Plan 2040 to recommend removing parking requirements.

As in many cities, housing affordability is a significant issue in Minneapolis, with the high cost of structured parking a key factor. City staff pointed out that developers often have to start planning their projects by considering how much parking is required and then designing their building around those parking requirements. Minneapolis planners saw an advantage in their city's effective and expanding transit network, and had worked previously to establish and fine-tune maximum parking regulations, based on the philosophy that "our neighborhoods will not be places to store cars."

Updates to the city's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) policy were crucial to Minneapolis's parking reform efforts. The policy improves function for all transportation modes when a project is built. TDM requirements were expanded to apply to residential projects of 50 or more units, and non-residential projects with more than 25,000 SF of Gross Floor Area. Changes to TDM policy de-emphasized the use of traffic studies and created a points system where developers are required to incorporate multiple means of mitigation, depending on the size of building and its context. Options in this new system include providing transit passes to new residents, and providing very few or no parking spaces.



In 2021, The City of Minneapolis eliminated off-street parking requirements citywide.

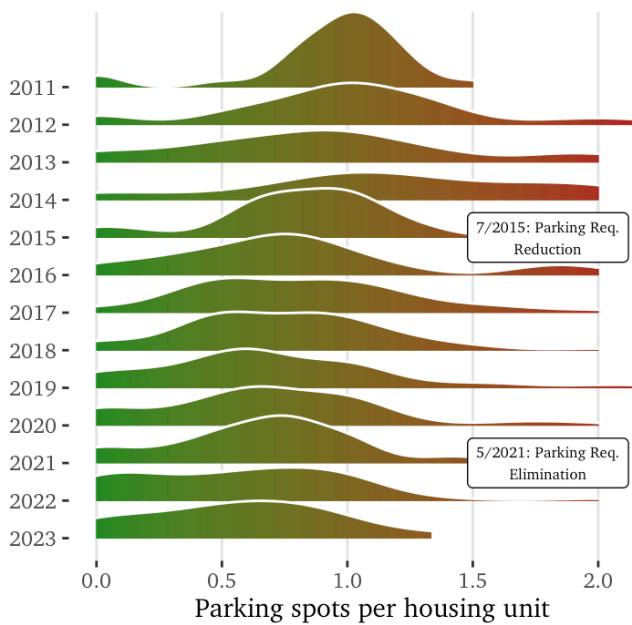
Minneapolis staff worked to eliminate barriers to highly sought-after uses like grocery stores in neighborhoods, including reducing loading area requirements to allow them to fit into smaller properties. Parking policies now limit street frontage of surface parking and the number of spaces in surface parking lots. Demand for parking is further managed through residential permit programs and public parking facilities in downtown areas. Minneapolis staff say their data shows a decline in the amount of parking provided for new development. Twenty years ago, one parking space per unit was typical. Now, 0.5-0.6 spaces per unit are typical citywide, with lower ratios in transit-rich areas.

"No single legislative action did more to contribute to housing creation than the elimination of parking minimums"

- Minneapolis Director of City Planning

Minneapolis is building less parking

Annual density distributions of building-parking ratios



Graph by Zak Yudhishthu
Data from Minneapolis Planning Commission
Collected by Alex Schieferdecker, updated July 2023

Minneapolis staff say their data shows a decline in the amount of parking provided for new development.

Combined with previous “missing middle” housing reforms, parking reform has opened opportunities for new housing types that wouldn’t have been previously feasible, increasing housing diversity in areas that didn’t have it previously. In some cases, 12-unit residential structures have been built on lots that were previously limited to duplex uses. Removing parking requirements has also enabled easier re-tenanting of existing commercial spaces, which has proven to be a less visible but key benefit.

Minneapolis planners shared that an incremental approach to parking reform over many years, combined with zoning reform, has helped them achieve multiple citywide goals. The Director of City Planning stated, “No single legislative action did more to contribute to housing creation than the elimination of parking minimums”.

Portland, OR

In June of 2023, Portland removed all minimum parking requirements with the Parking Compliance Amendments Project (PCAP), the final piece of a 20+ year effort to reduce parking minimums. The PCAP brought Portland into alignment with Oregon's 2022 Climate Friendly and Equitable Communities (CFEC) legislation, intended to reduce climate pollution, provide more transportation and housing choices, and promote more equitable land use planning outcomes. The legislation required cities of a certain size to either eliminate parking requirements or implement measures to reduce parking minimums. Since Portland had already eliminated parking minimums in the most populated areas of the city, they opted to remove them altogether.

Prior to eliminating parking requirements, the City of Portland adopted the Residential Infill Project in 2021, which allowed more types of housing, including duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, in existing single-unit dwelling zones, and removed parking requirements for residential uses in those zones. The city already had long-standing parking waivers for developments located within 500 feet of frequent transit or within 1,500 feet of light rail stations. In addition, some areas, such as Commercial Storefront zones and the downtown area, have not required parking minimums for more than thirty years.

Parking maximums have been part of the zoning code for more than twenty years, but they have not been applied to single-unit or duplex residential uses. New provisions for Transportation Demand Management were added after adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Update in 2016. For accessible parking, Oregon building code regulates minimum ADA spaces, as a function of the number of parking spaces provided. If no parking is proposed for a development, there is no requirement for accessible spaces. If 1 to 25 parking spaces are provided, then at least one must be an accessible space.

Development in Portland is providing less off-street parking. Portland planners report that parking reform, combined with the effects of the Residential Infill Project, allowed 350 units of additional housing to be built from 2021 to 2024 that would not have been possible under previous minimum parking requirements. If off-street parking were required, few middle housing projects (3- and 4-plexes, cottage clusters) would have been feasible to build, as 74% of such units had no off-street parking. The development pattern enabled by eliminating parking requirements has helped to support Portland's centers and corridors strategy for mixed use development along key corridors and in established centers, with lower density residential in between.



Portland's parking and residential infill reforms have fostered redevelopment of key corridors, like Division Street pictured above.

Longmont, CO

In May of 2024, Longmont completed a ten-year process of removing minimum parking requirements and replacing them with maximums citywide. This process took place in three phases, starting with commercial and industrial land uses in 2014, followed by removing parking requirements downtown and mixed-use corridors in 2022, and finally removing requirements throughout the city. Community activists and housing advocates helped make the case for these reforms to city council members, who ultimately directed staff to remove all minimum parking requirements. Longmont prides itself on being an independent-minded community, and allowing property owners and developers to determine their own needs with less government intervention fit well with that philosophy.

While many communities rely on pre-written ratios from the Institute of Transportation Engineers or other groups, Longmont planners took a critical eye to these recommendations and worked to study parking rates in their own community. Planners found that standard “textbook” ratios are not well-supported by evidence, with confidence levels and small sample sizes for certain uses low enough to be unreliable.

Longmont planners did not want to simply rely on typical requirements in other communities or outdated manuals, and instead sought to determine parking generation rates in their own community, and work from there to set a new baseline. City staff identified contextual variables like availability of transit, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, densities, cost of parking, and commissioned a study of recent multifamily developments. The study found that development, including market rate, mixed market-rate and affordable residences, and senior housing, did not fully utilize their parking. Instead, the study found that only 70-80% of existing parking was being utilized, leading Longmont planners to propose a new maximum parking rate of two spaces per residential unit.



In 2024, The City of Longmont eliminated off-street parking requirements citywide.

Prior to proposing the final amendments to the City’s parking code, staff consulted with developers and used their expertise to create workable parking maximum for new developments, set at 120% of the minimum requirements for non-residential parking. Planners paid special attention to certain uses when transitioning minimum requirements to maximum requirements. For example, group care homes required a minimum of one parking space per four beds, and now allow a maximum of three parking spaces per four beds.

Longmont staff has found that removal of parking requirements has made reviews easier on both staff and applicants, as staff no longer needs to review compliance with parking requirements, and applicants have more flexibility to design projects without needing to conform to arbitrary standards. As a result, the city has attracted several multi-family developments that would not have been feasible under the previous parking requirements.

Additional Outcomes



When Seattle eliminated minimum parking requirements near transit over ten years ago, most new development still chose to provide on-site parking.

“In Buffalo, New York, which struck down parking requirements in April 2017, a [review of 36 major developments](#) showed that 53 percent of projects still opted to include at least as many parking spaces as the previous code had required. The developers who did propose building less parking averaged 60 fewer parking spaces than the old minimum required, avoiding over eight acres of unnecessary asphalt and saving up to \$30 million in construction costs.

Seattle saw similar results after eliminating parking requirements near transit in 2012. A study of 868 residential developments permitted in the following five years found that 70 percent of new buildings in areas not subject to parking requirements still chose to have on-site parking. Collectively, the new buildings included 40 percent fewer parking spaces than would have previously been required, saving an estimated \$537 million in construction costs and freeing up 144 acres of land.” (Gould, 2022)

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