



TO: Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
FROM: Justin Montgomery, AICP, Senior City Planner
DATE: May 15, 2025
RE: Modernizing Parking Requirements: Denver Zoning Code Text Amendment & Denver Revised Municipal Code Amendment

Staff Report and Recommendation

Based on the review criteria for text amendments set forth in the Denver Zoning Code (DZC), Section 12.4.11 (Text Amendment), CPD staff recommends that the Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure (LUTI) Committee move the Modernizing Parking Requirements Text Amendment forward for consideration by the full City Council. CPD also recommends that LUTI forward the proposed Denver Revised Municipal Code amendments for consideration by the full City Council.

Summary and Purpose

The proposed Modernizing Parking Requirements (MPR) text amendment is sponsored by City Council members Sarah Parady (at-large), Flor Alvidrez (District 7), Darrel Watson (District 9), and Chris Hinds (District 10) in partnership with Community Planning and Development (CPD), Department of Transportation & Infrastructure (DOTI), and the Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and Resiliency (CASR). The purpose of this text amendment is to repeal minimum vehicle parking requirements. There are several city policies that support this proposal. Land use, transportation, and climate action plans developed by CPD, DOTI, and CASR provide policies, strategies, and recommendations consistent with this text amendment. These plans were created with community engagement and collaboration with other city agencies, community partners, and city officials.

A LUTI Committee review draft of the proposed text amendment is available on the [project's webpage](#) and is included as an attachment to this staff report.

Background

The proposed Modernizing Parking Requirements text amendment is 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.

In the Denver Zoning Code (DZC), 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 in urban contexts and into the downtown core, where the city has 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. For example, an elementary school would have to provide one parking space per 1,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area in all Urban Edge zone districts as well as all Urban zone districts. 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 is allowed). The Downtown-Central Platte Valley (D-CPV) zone districts, added to the DZC in 2018, also have maximum parking standards.

The DZC 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, the DZC 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.

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. 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. 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 the exceptions, alternatives, and reductions discussed above.

Current parking mandates work against several city 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. This contributes to a reliance on cars as a means of transportation, creating more traffic congestion and air pollution.

If approved, 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 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.

Related State Law

In May 2024, the State of Colorado adopted legislation affecting minimum parking requirements within metropolitan planning organizations across the state. This proposed text amendment will bring Denver in compliance with state law. The effective date of this law is June 30, 2025.

Proposed Changes

The MPR text amendment proposes to repeal all minimum vehicular parking requirements. The removal of these parking mandates enables a reorganization of Division 10.4 Parking and Loading and the following additional changes to the Denver Zoning Code:

- **Removes parking exceptions:** Parking exemptions, alternative ratios, reductions, and shared parking standards are no longer necessary when minimum parking requirements are removed. This eliminates pages of zoning text to streamline the code. Shared parking will still be encouraged as part of the Transportation Demand Management program administered by DOTI.
- **Creates simplified Use Tables:** The existing Use and Minimum Parking Tables found in all neighborhood and special contexts are converted into simpler Use Tables because the parking information for every land use in every zone district can be removed.
- **Consolidates Bicycle Parking Requirements:** Building off the simplified Use Tables, the bicycle parking requirements found in all Use and Minimum Parking Tables are retained and moved to one location (Article 10) of the code. The existing bicycle parking requirements are not proposed to change with this amendment.
- **Maintains Maximum Parking Requirements:** Existing maximum parking requirements for surface parking near transit and maximum vehicle parking requirements in the Downtown Central Platte Valley zone districts are maintained with this proposal.

In addition to the DZC text amendment, there are two other related proposals:

- **Proposed Denver Revised Municipal Code (DRMC) Amendments to Chapter 27 and Former Chapter 59 (FC59) Zone Districts:** The City Council sponsors for the MPR text amendment and staff introduced related DRMC amendments to eliminate minimum vehicle parking requirements in FC59 zone districts and remove parking reductions and exemptions from Chapter 27. Note that Planning Board does not make a recommendation on proposed amendments to the DRMC.

Outreach and Public Process

Community outreach for the MPR project included in-person and virtual townhalls, participation at the Academy in the Community, press release, television and online news interviews, newspaper interviews, social media posts, and an online comment/question form. Below is a list of the public outreach and process:

Public Outreach

- People Love In – February 13, 2025
- D7 Townhall for MPR – April 2, 2025
- Sunnyside RNO Land Use Meeting – April 10, 2025
- MPR Virtual Townhall – April 15, 2025
- D6 Academy in the Community – April 16, 2025
- Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation Zoning and Planning Committee – April 22, 2025
- Highland United Neighbors Inc. Planning & Community Development Meeting – May 13, 2025

Mayor's Office, City Council, and Planning Board

- Mayor's Policy and Legislation Review Committee – October 4, 2024
- City Councilmember Briefings – November 2024
- City Council Budget and Policy Committee – December 9, 2024
- Planning Board Information Item – March 19, 2025
- City Councilmember Briefings – April-May 2025

Text Amendment Adoption Process Timeline

- Text Amendment Drafting Initiated – December 9, 2024
- Text Amendment Internal Agency Referral #1 – March 11, 2025
- Text Amendment Courtesy Public Review Draft – April 4, 2025
- Text Amendment Internal Agency Referral #2 – April 8, 2025
- Planning Board Hearing Public Notification – April 22, 2025
- Planning Board Public Hearing – May 7, 2025, Unanimously recommended approval (9-0)
- LUTI Committee – May 20, 2025
- Mayor Council – May 27, 2025*
- City Council First Reading – June 9, 2025*
- City Council Public Hearing – July 7, 2025*

* Anticipated dates are confirmed during the legislative review process and subject to change.

Written comments: Comments and questions were encouraged through an online form on the project's webpage and were also provided via email. Staff received 308 comments and questions from the public on this project, prior to the cutoff time for this report (5/14/25 at 5pm). Approximately 77% of the comments received expressed support for the text amendment, 3% were questions, and 20% expressed opposition to the text amendment. The comments are attached to this staff report.

There were common themes expressed in the written comments. Those in support of the project mention that parking requirements help create a car dependent city that's unsustainable. The support comments tout this proposed text amendment as an opportunity to support alternative modes of transportation and create walkable neighborhoods. The comments connect the cost of developing parking as a barrier to housing. It should also be noted that several comments in support also urge the city to do more than the scope of this proposed amendment, such as establishing more maximum parking standards, creating parking districts, and mandating the provision of RTD EcoPasses for tenants of new developments.

The comments in opposition to the proposed text amendment highlight concerns that the removal of minimum parking requirements will lead to an inadequate amount of parking for new developments, exacerbating demand for on-street parking. The opposing comments often stated that most people in Denver need cars, especially to drive to the mountains, and they reference the need to fix RTD or create a better public transportation system before removing parking mandates. Lastly, there is a perception that this proposal will eliminate existing parking throughout the city and applicants will take advantage of a lack of parking requirements in a harmful way.

In-person and Virtual Townhalls: The City Council sponsors and staff from CPD and DOTI, hosted an in-person townhall and a virtual townhall that focused on providing information about the MPR text amendment. There were approximately 30 attendees at the in-person townhall. The sponsors and staff

gave presentations and then answered questions from the public for the remaining time. For the virtual townhall, there were 83 people registered, and the sponsors and staff answered dozens of questions verbally and in writing. The virtual townhall was recorded and made available on the project's webpage in English and Spanish.

Review Criteria and CPD Staff Evaluation

The criteria for review of a proposed text amendment are found in Section 12.4.11.4 of the DZC. CPD analyzed the proposed text amendment for compliance with the review criteria stated below and finds that the proposed text amendment satisfies each of the review criteria:

1. Consistency With Adopted Plans

The proposed text amendment is consistent with the following adopted plans, strategies and policies:

- *Comprehensive Plan 2040* (2019)
- *Blueprint Denver* (2019)

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.

Minimum parking requirements work against the city's vision for walkable, bikeable, accessible and transit friendly neighborhoods and places. Removing parking mandates is an innovative parking policy many cities across the country are implementing to discourage auto-centric communities and promote multimodal transportation.

Blueprint Denver (2019)

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. The proposed text amendment is consistent with the following *Blueprint Denver* policies:

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)

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)

The proposed text amendment responds to the city's need to prioritize housing and makes our parking regulations modern and flexible. Applicants will be able to right-size the amount of

parking provided for their uses and property, depending on their target market and the surrounding context. This revision also facilitates adaptive reuse projects and compatible redevelopment of institutional sites within neighborhoods by allowing the primary use to be prioritized over a specified number of parking spaces. This amendment also helps to ensure active and pedestrian friendly environments by extending parking flexibility to all land uses and making it more feasible for smaller-scale businesses to serve residential neighborhoods.

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)

The proposed text amendment promotes development that creates walkable, transit-friendly communities by allowing for a fine-grained mix of uses that aren't spread out by large parking lots. This is aligned with Denver Moves Everyone 2040 and the Curbside Action Plan, developed by DOTI, which embraces a modal hierarchy that informs curbside functions and priorities: people first, single occupancy vehicle trips last.

Quality-of-Life Infrastructure

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

The proposed text amendment promotes environmentally friendly development strategies by removing the requirement to provide a set number of vehicle parking spaces with each land use. The additional development area this offers for the primary use rather than parking and the potential reduction in impermeable surfaces can foster creative urban design and green infrastructure in the public and private realms.

2. Public Health, Safety and Welfare

The text amendment furthers the public health, safety and welfare of Denver residents, landowners, and community members by implementing the city's adopted plans. This proposed text amendment supports walkable neighborhoods and encourages active transportation. It can also lower the cost of construction and allow for more housing units, as well as more affordable housing.

3. Uniformity of District Regulations and Restrictions

The text amendment will result in updated regulations that are uniform within each zone district.

Attachments

1. LUTI Committee review draft of the Modernizing Parking Requirements text amendment
2. Comments and Questions received from the public
3. Modernizing Parking Requirements Background & Peer Cities Report