Parking Requirements: Reducing Minimums & Improving Management

In a Nutshell

Required parking is a very common feature in most urban and suburban cities in the United States. Most municipal zoning codes have minimum off-street parking requirements, based on the size of an office, restaurant, or retail space. There are many unintended consequences related to requiring too much parking, both economically and environmentally, as surmised in the book by UCLA Professor Donald Shoup, The High Cost of Free Parking. Creating alternatives to mandatory parking requirements allow municipalities to take into account local community and area-specific variables that creates a customized, more efficient, and more business and environmentally friendly approach to managing parking demand.

The "How To"

Getting Started

Initially your plan of action will be based on what approaches to parking management you select. The Planning & Zoning tab offers more detail on a whole host of options and tools. For example, a local government may choose to pursue maximum parking requirements in their downtown district, or shared parking in a suburban retail corridor, or overhaul all of their parking regulations across the city. These decisions will drive your implementation. Some of the questions your parking management strategic plan will have to answer include:

- Are we evaluating parking citywide? Or do we just want to target certain districts and/or residential neighborhoods?
- What is our current parking situation? Are there parts of town where supply does not meet demand? Are we fielding complaints about inadequate parking? Are there parts of town where there are large, unused parking lots? Why does an abundance of parking exist in some areas?
- How do developers feel about your parking requirements?
- What other transportation modes are offered in your community? Is there a segment of the population that could walk? Ride a bicycle? Take a bus? Ride Metrolink?
- Why does your community have the parking it does? And why is it where it is today? Is there a better system?

Your plan will evaluate a parking management strategy from these three high-level perspectives:

1. Reduce Oversupply
2. Better Manage Demand
3. Adopt Market-Based Pricing Strategies

When performing this analysis it is important to evaluate your community's character:

- Population and density
- Availability of transportation choices
- Land-use mix

- Development types

Mandatory Parking Minimums is What We Know. What Other Options Exist?

A good place to start is a report published by the EPA, Parking Space & Community Spaces: Finding the Balance Through Smart-Growth Solutions, using input from municipalities and counties. The report reviews a case study, the SAFECO company in Seattle, and their alternative approach to parking at their offices. The report reviews the lack of local customization in establishing parking standards for a community, and thus the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach. The report then details how such poorly sized parking requirements then cost everyone more - the cost on businesses and developers is direct and immediate. Further, businesses are then also saddled with long-term maintenance expenses. Ultimately consumers absorb all of those costs at the retail register. Furthermore, the municipality and community lose opportunities for more or better positioned development because key business districts are rapidly consumed by large parking lots that may only be fully used on occasion. For example, a place that could have been a restaurant outlot and generated revenue for the community while producing additional jobs, is instead dozens of unneeded parking spaces.

The City of St. Louis has eliminated all parking requirements in the Central Business district, allowing developers to choose the right amount of parking needed for their project. This can reduce costs significantly and leave more funds available for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

For a more detailed review of what solutions exist, that EPA report provides approaches beginning on page 13, as well as the book Flexible Parking Standards published by the American Planning Association. Again, the High Cost of Free Parking mentioned in the introduction to this tool is helpful. More solutions and model ordinances are included on the Planning & Zoning tab.

Planning & Zoning

Implementation for Cities & Counties

Overview

Cities and counties will need to address at least these steps to reform their parking management programs:

1. Conduct an assessment of your current parking environment and evaluate strategies for improvement
2. Evaluate the various tools and best practices in parking management to draft a strategic plan for parking in your community
3. Work through the appropriate legal and legislative channels to amend, modify, reform, and adopt parking requirements and programming to implement the plan
4. Monitor and adjust, including public feedback and studies, to ensure new parking management measures are achieving the goals

Performing the Initial Assessments

The main role for units of local government will be updating their municipal, subdivision, and development codes (also perhaps zoning language) to reflect new parking management approaches. Such action will need to be taken for each individual tool in many cases, or in some cases if a local government chooses to overhaul all of their parking regulation across the entire city, a comprehensive smart parking ordinance may apply. The**first step** is deciding which new parking management strategies make sense for your community - this is a strategic analysis that should be locally customized. This should be a patient, thorough examination engaging the community in similar methods to a comprehensive or neighborhood planning process. Some of the parking management tools you will need to evaluate include:

- Shared Parking
- Peak Pricing, Flexible Pricing, Regulated Parking Use, and Charge-for-Parking
- Adjusted Parking Demand
- Reduce Street Widths
- Parking Maximums
- Park & Ride Facilities
- Smart Growth & Transit Friendly Design
- Improve Walkability/Bikability
- Parking Brokerages
- Parking Capacity Enhancements
- Carsharing
- Financial Incentives for Commuters - Parking Cash-Out & Transit Incentives
- Unbundled Parking Costs to Developers
- Parking Lot Property Tax Structures
- Regulated Parking Passes
- Bicycle Parking Facilities & Bike Stations
- Overflow Parking Plans
- Parking Spillover Plans

A fairly comprehensive database of various parking reduction strategies and implementation can be found hosted by the Victoria Transport Institute, through their TDM Encyclopedia.

How Do We Evaluate What Makes Sense for Us?

The City of St. Louis has eliminated all parking requirements in the Central Business district, allowing developers to choose the right amount of parking needed for their project. This can reduce costs significantly and leave more funds available for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Other cities that have eliminated minimum parking requirements include Buffalo, Minneapolis, and Hartford. An extremely user-friendly Parking Policy Playbook was published by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the San Francisco region. For more detailed, code-based strategies to implement these regulations, the American Planning Association offers a book Smart Codes. Locally, in the St. Louis region Citizens for Modern Transit offers information on ways employers can provide alternate ways to commute to work. More information on these approaches is offered by Best Workplaces for Commuters. All of these aim at the reality that for many citizens most of their miles-traveled are related to commuting to work.

Also work with your local city/county planners, land use and zoning professionals, and your city attorney to develope the plan and evaluate implementation policies.

Dollars & Cents

The Cost to Local Government Agencies

Calculating the cost benefit of applying alternative parking standards (such as parking maximums, shared parking, or fees in lieu of parking) is case-by-case specific and highly dependent on your local community. The cost of implementing them can be fairly minimal - beyond staff time, potential attorneys' fees, and perhaps local trainings for community partners on the new standards, there is little in the way of infrastructure or capital outlay costs. Simply adjusting your existing mandatory minimum parking requirements to a more accurate figure would require virtually no expense. Other regulatory programs are similiarly minimal. However, if a city or county chooses to guide new transit investment, build sidewalks and bicycle lanes/trails, and other more capital/infrastructure intensive solutions to reduce parking demand, those obviously carry a much higher cost.

Cost-Benefit Analysis & Economic Expansion

The "How-to" tab details information from a report from the EPA about how poorly sized parking requirements cost everyone more - including businesses, developers, consumers, and municipalities. The ultimate cost benefit to the community of reducing parking minimums can be tremendously impactful. Local urban planners, developers, real estate professionals, and even bankers can help calculate the savings associated with more dynamic parking strategies. For a new, proposed development it is relatively simple to demonstrate the total project costs - basically show the development budget under the old regulations and the new. There will also likely be increased tax revenue paid to the municipality over time. A city or county can calculate these types of figures in a traditional project impact analysis.

The Transportation Research Board published a report with several partners that demonstrates the economics associated with parking management approaches. Additional perspective on how unneccessary parking costs more money to everyone can also demonstrate the costs vs. benefits.

Measuring Success

There have been many research studies that have demonstrated the positive effects of parking management strategies. One such report was published by the Institute for Transportation & Development Policy with the Department of City & Regional Planning at UPenn, titled U.S. Parking Policies: An Overview of Management Strategies. It reviews many of the benefits through specific case studies. The founder and executive director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute has written and published a book that review these approaches in considerable detail, titledParking Management Best Practices.

Demonstrating Success in your Local Community

There are many metrics a community can develop to track progress on a better parking management strategy. The easiest way to evaluate success is by defining it through your initial goal-setting. Create ways to measure whether your goals are being met. The EPA's Smart Growth Parking Strategy offers six local government successful case studies and how they achieved their goals. The above linked reports also provide frameworks for evaluating whether parking supply is better meeting demand.

Discover More

TheParking Management Comprehensive Implementation Guide from the Victoria Transport Policy Institute is also a useful place to find additional resources on any of these topics.

Impacts on Affordable Housing

Another important community goal is maintaining and creating a plentiful stock of affordable housing options. This report from the Victoria Transport Policy Institute demonstrates how excessive minimum parking requirements lowers the overall supply of affordable housing.

Case Studies

City of St. Louis Central Business District

Contact

Don Roe
Acting Director
314-657-3848

Description

City of St. Louis eliminated all parking requirements in the Central Business district. This means that developers can choose the amount of parking to build.

Cost

City of St. Louis staff time, no additional costs

Lessons Learned

Eliminating parking requirements allows developers to choose the right amount of parking needed for their project. This could significantly reduce the cost of projects, as parking underground and garage parking is expensive to build. The City's Department of Planning and Urban Design should work directly with developers to endure they understand the new requirements and can significantly cut project costs by not building parking.

The St. Louis Code

Kansas City Downtown Core District

Contact

Kansas City Planning Department
816-513-1511

Description

The City of Kansas City eliminated off-street parking requirements in the Downtown Core District. This means developers can choose the amount of parking to build.

Cost

Staff time, no addional costs

Lessons Learned

According to the Planning Department, the new code requirement has not changed parking significantly in the Loop District, to date. Additional education and encouragement for developers to build less parking could be a strategy. The Planning Department could work directly with developers to ensure they understand the new requirements.

Kansas City's code