

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Like most California cities, Sacramento is constantly evolving in an effort to respond to the growing challenges of the 21st century. Many of these challenges are transportation-related, as public agencies and individuals seek out new and improved modes of travel in response to rising gas prices, increasing congestion, and changing demographics. With the economic recession and the loss of redevelopment agencies as a key economic tool, California cities also face unprecedented fiscal challenges. The breadth and depth of these challenges require innovative and creative approaches that target our transportation systems, but do so in a way that also fosters continued economic growth.

Parking is undoubtedly a crucial transportation issue. Parking affects how the overall transportation network functions while impacting individual choices about where people live and how they travel. Parking is also an economic issue which is intimately connected to the vibrancy of commercial districts and small business, and is a key factor in the success of new office, commercial, and housing developments.

The City of Sacramento Zoning Code Parking Update is a citywide effort to fundamentally reform how Sacramento plans, designs, builds, evaluates, and thinks about its parking resources. It seeks to address both transportation and economic challenges through a comprehensive and data-driven evaluation process that allows a deeper understanding of Sacramento's parking issues. The Zoning Code Parking Update works within the existing policy framework for parking, but seeks to incorporate innovative and creative solutions to common and long-standing parking challenges.

In the end, this project will enable more effective management of Sacramento's parking resources with the goal of creating flexibility to meet market demands while minimizing impacts on residents and neighbors. The recommendations provided in this report are also designed to support and reinforce other City parking reform efforts, such as the updated Residential Permit Parking Program. Equally important, however, is that the recommendations for a new zoning code seek to create a flexible regulatory environment in which developers are empowered to explore creative parking plans and utilize proven tools to manage parking.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of existing conditions, stakeholder interviews and a review of the current City parking standards, a number of key findings can be made.

Finding #1: Constructing more off-street parking will not relieve on-street parking congestion.

Throughout Sacramento there is a large amount of publicly available parking that already exists, but is largely underutilized. While several stakeholders mentioned that on-street parking congestion is a key concern, data show that there is ample off-street parking capacity at peak hour, with almost 46,000 vacant spaces in the Center City alone. These spaces are underutilized because of pricing structures that encourage the use of free on-street parking and discourage the use of expensive off-street lots and garages. Many available parking facilities are also difficult to locate due to poor wayfinding. In brief, it makes little sense to require already challenging infill projects to provide significant amounts of additional parking while large amounts of parking remains unused.

Finding #2: The impact of parking standards on development feasibility is highly sensitive to the size of the site and scale of the project, especially for mixed use projects.

It is increasingly difficult to fit the current amount of parking required into a buildable project as the site and project become smaller. This is broadly true, from both a design and a financial perspective. Developers of larger projects in both Downtown and the commercial corridors emphasized that their ability to accommodate or exceed current standards for residential and office was largely due to the size of their projects and sites. Developers of small mixed use and retail projects reported great difficulty accommodating current standards on-site, especially for retail uses, and *all projects attained some combination of off-site parking allowance and/or parking waivers.*

Finding #3: Current parking requirements associated with storefront commercial uses are exceeding parking demand rates associated with urban retail, are onerous for in-fill projects, and are overly specific.

Based on current retail parking requirements in the Central City, a typical 2,800 square foot restaurant would need approximately 37 on-site parking spaces, or 13 spaces per 1,000 square feet. These requirements do not reflect actual parking conditions within the Central City, in particular within the Downtown and Midtown, where numerous businesses are located on a single block and pedestrians can easily walk from business to business. Because many of these businesses have different hours of operation, and different times of peak demand for parking, it is unnecessary and inefficient for buildings in districts containing complementary businesses to provide 100% of potential demand for parking for each individual business. Current retail parking standards do not take into consideration the character of urban shopping districts and would produce excessive amounts of parking, if applied.

Current zoning standards include six distinct parking requirements for different types of commercial and recreational uses that are likely to locate in the Central City. These distinctions mean that successive businesses moving into the same retail space over time are asked to provide changing amounts of on-site parking within a site and for buildings which have not changed except for tenant improvements. In practice, such requirements cannot be reasonably accomplished, thereby requiring discretionary waivers or allowances for off-site parking for changes in use or tenancy. This additional effort and risk complicates the leasing process for both tenant and landlord and discourages natural turnover which is necessary to keep retail space occupied and encourage business growth.

Current zoning in the Central City (C-2 NC) is intended to encourage development of new housing in commercial corridors in low to medium density residential neighborhoods and allows a building height of 45 feet. However, *all* developer interview subjects described current on-site retail parking standards, especially restaurant standards, as impossible to accommodate, thereby requiring that all built projects receive waivers and/or allowances for off-site parking.

Finding #4: Current Central City office and residential parking standards are consistent with the current market. However, greater flexibility to meet evolving market demand for on-site parking is desirable.

Developers and brokers of office space in the Downtown were generally satisfied with current standards, including the maximum of not more than one space per 400 square feet. The large amount of existing commercial parking available in Downtown is also a resource that new projects should be allowed to draw on.

Developers of larger in-fill residential projects thought the current one parking space to one unit ratio for multi-family projects of three units or more was consistent with the current market. However, developers of smaller mixed use projects believed that the market would support lower parking requirements.

In general, developers interviewed stated that on-site parking for office and residential uses is best determined by the market and expressed a preference for greater flexibility.

Finding #5: The current entitlement process regarding parking creates uncertainty and absorbs an inordinate amount of time and resources.

Since current retail parking requirements are largely infeasible for infill projects, many projects require special public hearings regarding parking waivers or allowance of off-site parking. Developers also described lengthy entitlement processes involving multiple discretionary reviews that revisited parking requirements, even after project construction had begun. While waivers or allowances are frequently approved, the need for public hearings increases the cost of the entitlement process, delays the approval of projects and increases the risk associated with entitlements. The degree of uncertainty regarding entitlements is also a significant barrier to new development.

Finding #6: Parking dimensions are oversized and unnecessarily consume valuable land

A review of other industry standards, typical design vehicles sizes, and other municipalities found that Sacramento's required parking dimensions sizes are larger than necessary, particularly in terms of the length of parking stalls and maneuvering aisles. This complicates redevelopment as many older lots struggle to accommodate oversized parking layouts - the smaller a lot, the greater the problem. Because larger stalls consume more space the existing code directly affects the financial viability of many projects – effectively swaying the market away from smaller infill projects, in favor of larger projects.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes a series of recommended modifications to the City's zoning code. The most influential of those recommendations include:

Recommendation #1: Exempt projects on small lots, and retail, restaurant, and service uses within mixed-use developments, from parking requirements

Current standards exempt retail development projects on lots of less than 5,200 square feet in the Central City from providing parking. A more appropriate ceiling for a parking exemption would be for retail, restaurant, and service uses on a typical historic single-family Midtown lot size, or no more than 6,400 square feet. In addition, retail, restaurant, and service uses within larger vertical mixed-use projects should be exempt from minimum parking requirements as long as at least 50% of its square footage is devoted to residential uses in order to create a truly mixed-use environment that decreases both parking demand and traffic generation. Allowing retail uses within larger residential developments contributes greatly to the livability of the development and surrounding area, and has minimal side effects because most of the trips to these uses can be on foot – reducing external trips, and reducing the necessity of vehicle ownership.

Recommendation #2: Permit shared parking, and adjust restaurant requirements

Recommendation #2-1: Create context-sensitive standards that reflect the range of hours of operation and peak customer hours for businesses common to urban shopping districts, the walkability of these areas, and the increased likelihood that customers park once and visit multiple establishments, or take transit. Allow for shared parking solutions that take advantage of this potential, as-of-right.

Recommendation #2-2: Adjust on-site parking standards for restaurants so that the amount of space devoted to parking is roughly commensurate with the amount of space devoted to the restaurant use. Adjust commercial categories for storefront retail and personal services businesses that have more evenly distributed customer flows so that the amount of space devoted to parking is approximately one quarter of the space devoted to storefront commercial uses. Allow off-site parking as-of-right.

Recommendation #3: Introduce greater flexibility to meet future demand

In order to allow greater flexibility to build projects that meet market demand as it evolves over time, reduce current residential standards to allow the inclusion of units without parking (i.e. a ratio of less than 1:1). Allow off-site office parking, as-of-right.

Recommendation #4: Simplify parking requirements across categories and make process more predictable

Develop identical parking requirements for multiple categories, in order to simplify redevelopment. In fully developed areas, existing buildings tend to be stuck with the amount of parking that was included when originally built (if any). If multiple uses are required to provide the same amount of parking, then it is easy for businesses to move in to existing properties.

Reduce requirements for public hearings before appointed or elected bodies. Increase the certainty of the approvals process by bringing standards into better alignment with the market (as previously recommended), providing a greater number of as-of-right options, such as off-site parking, shared parking and voluntary in-lieu fee. Allow staff greater authority to grant waiver requests without public hearing, as appropriate.

Recommendation #5: The Central Business District, many areas within Midtown, and several commercial corridors have a substantial available supply of parking. These facilities should be maximized before additional commercial parking is built.

Maximize use of existing parking for new development, before requiring additional onsite parking. As steps to achieving this:

- Eliminate minimum parking requirements in the Central Business District.
- Reduce minimum parking requirements primarily in Urban and Traditional districts.
- Eliminate parking requirements for retail, restaurant, and service uses on lots equal to or less than 6,400 square feet.
- Eliminate parking requirements for retail, restaurant, and service uses within mixed-use developments where at least half the total area is residential.

In addition, developers should be able to meet their minimum parking requirements by right through the provision or leasing of nearby off-site facilities. Due to the denser nature of urban districts, 1,250 feet (a 5-minute walk) is considered acceptable for commercial and 400 feet for residential (a 1.5-minute walk). In more inner suburban locales, parking within 1,000 feet (a 4-minute walk) is considered acceptable for commercial and 300 feet for residential (a 1-minute walk). In the rest of the city, 300 feet (a 1-minute walk) is allowed for all uses.

Finally, available on-street parking abutting a project site may be counted toward the minimum parking requirement, by right.

Recommendation #6: Introduce a voluntary parking in-lieu fee

A voluntary parking in-lieu fee program would allow proposed projects or uses to pay a designated fee rather than provide an on-site parking space. The purpose of the program would not be to impose an additional fee on development but to provide an alternative for projects having difficulty meeting on-site requirements. The fee would be a one-time, \$4,000 per-space fee with revenues dedicate to the construction of new public parking facilities and improvements that result in greater potential for use of alternative transportation modes, reducing the need for parking in the same area in which the project was built.

Recommendation #7: Allow greater flexibility in parking dimensions

It is recommended that the City provide more flexibility in parking lot design by allowing for lower minimum stall depth and maneuvering width dimensions for non-parallel spaces to offer developers the opportunity to meet site-specific needs. Parallel space sizes should be reduced to a minimum of 8' x 22'. By providing these minimum standards, the City can ensure both efficient parking space access and circulation design of the parking lot to minimize both on-street queuing and ingress/egress conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists.

Based on the review of minimum compact car stall sizes in other cities and ULI's concerns regarding compact spaces, Sacramento should reduce the stall depth for compact cars by almost

one foot and increase the allowable number of compact spaces to 50%. Requiring a 15-foot stall depth for compact parking stalls along with guidance for longer end stall depths for maneuvering requirements is a standard practice for all the other cities reviewed. However, planning staff's approval should be required to introduce compact spaces once the applicant has shown that they can function properly.

Recommendation #8: Enhance bicycle parking facilities

In order to meet the requirements of the California Green Building Standards Code, the City should require both short-term and long-term bicycle parking for all land uses. The amount of bicycle parking would be tied to land use, not to vehicle parking. The type and location of parking must meet best practices, as articulated by the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals. Where appropriate, developers may pay an in-lieu fee instead of installing bicycle parking, equal to the cost of the City installing on-street bicycle parking adjacent to the project.

Recommendation #9: Allow development relief from minimum parking requirements by allowing alternatives to on-site parking and/or implementing Transportation Demand Management programs

If developments opt to introduce Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures that have shown to reduce or manage parking demand, they would be eligible for reductions in their minimum parking requirements. In addition, those employers who have an approved transportation management plan (TMP), which include many of these TDM measures, should be automatically granted a minimum 35% reduction in their minimum parking requirement. This makes it more feasible to meet the individual needs of sites rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all system.