



Policy Tool: Reduced Parking Requirements for Residential Development

Examples: Zoning codes in San Francisco, CA, Portland, OR and Seattle, WA

Summary: Reducing or eliminating off-street parking requirements for housing developments in transit-rich neighborhoods both helps reduce vehicle ownership and use and makes housing more affordable.

Most local zoning codes require residential and other developments to include a minimum amount of parking for each unit. Such provisions guarantee that all housing will have parking readily available, preventing spillover parking on neighborhood streets but also encouraging automobile ownership and use. Requiring housing developers to provide parking increases development costs and makes the resulting housing less affordable. In order to reduce vehicle use and housing costs, a handful of cities have moved to reduce or eliminate off-street parking requirements for housing development, particularly in locations well-served by transit and for affordable housing developments whose residents are less likely to own cars.

According to the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, “San Francisco has evolved over the last half century from a municipality that once required one parking space for every new dwelling to one of the most innovative examples of parking management in the country” (Weinberger, Kaehny & Rufo, 2010 at 50). The city has eliminated zoning requirements for a minimum number of parking spaces for residential, commercial or other projects in the downtown. In addition, the city established maximum allowable amounts of parking; for example, a maximum of one space is permitted for every four downtown residential housing units. Outside of downtown, neighborhoods can eliminate residential minimum parking requirements by adopting neighborhood plans; the 1997 Mission Bay Redevelopment Plan eliminated parking minimums for housing. More recently, the 2005 Rincon Hill Plan was the first to eliminate minimum parking

requirements for all uses in a residential neighborhood (Weinberger, Kaehny & Rufo, 2010).

In Portland, Oregon, parking minimums do not apply to developments in the densest commercial neighborhoods, including downtown, neighborhood commercial districts and central residential districts. As part of its strategy to promote transit-oriented development, Portland does not apply parking minimums to any sites within 500 feet of a transit line that provides service at least every 20 minutes during peak hours (EPA, 2006). Portland has also established maximum parking requirements at such sites; downtown, for example, no more than 0.7 spaces per 1,000 square feet can be provided at sites within walking distance of frequent transit service (MTC, 2007).

Seattle’s zoning code reduces minimum parking requirements for affordable housing, senior housing and housing for people with disabilities. Parking requirements are also reduced for multi-family developments that allow on-site parking for car sharing. Parking minimums have been eliminated for downtown locations and reduced for mixed-use, dense neighborhoods (EPA, 2006).

