

City of Seattle

Parking Review: Report to Council PLUS Committee

April 13, 2015

Purpose

In response to direction from the Mayor and Council, DPD and SDOT developed this report addressing parking in Seattle. The Council passed Ordinance 124608, which specifically requests an analysis of the City's vehicle and bicycle parking requirements for residential uses.

Parking is an important topic for cities, affecting the long-term prospects for a city's ability to grow and evolve in ways that are functional, economic and livable. Nationally, there is an increasing understanding of the relationships among parking policy and housing affordability, the transportation system, environmental sustainability, quality urban design and equity. Generational shifts to driving less and not owning personal vehicles, and new technologies are changing expectations about how to coordinate parking supply and demand. Choices are expanding and convenience is improving. Locally, Seattle's variety of transportation options are burgeoning with expansion of car share options, taxis, companies like Uber and Lyft, bike share, improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, bus, streetcar and light rail service.

Our current policies that enable tailoring how much parking is provided, based on residents' needs and alternative transportation choices, are targeted to the right areas – within walking distance of where transportation service is the greatest, and in the places that are fully consistent with our citywide growth strategies. Simply put, the approach prefers lower costs to build housing rather than the storage of automobiles. This approach will directly help more people be able to live in Seattle and have choices for how to move about the city and region. This approach will directly help limit congestion in our transportation system, and will help achieve City goals relating to growth management, air quality, carbon footprint, and other environmental interests. Requiring too much parking creates cost burdens that affect businesses, residents and our city's infrastructure. We believe continuing our current parking policies, along with adding residential transportation options and using on-street parking management strategies, is the most rational, responsible and equitable choice we can make. Increasing parking requirements for vehicles would be costly and counterproductive.

Guiding Principles

Below are guiding principles we've considered in developing the preliminary recommendations. The principles are consistent with broader policies in the Mayor and Council's Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda, Move Seattle's transportation strategy, the City's Comprehensive Plan, and other City policies and plans:

- Encouraging residential and employment growth to occur in Urban Centers and Villages consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's basic framework for managing growth. The City's parking policies must help achieve this objective.
- Retaining and enhancing Seattle neighborhoods' walkable and livable urban qualities, which are essential and preferable to automobile-oriented public places and buildings.
- Prioritizing housing affordability to preserve and enhance the ability of persons of all economic means to be able to live in Seattle. Parking is a significant cost factor. It is also one aspect of housing development that may be optional depending on location and market.

- Ensuring that racial and socio-economic equity is a key consideration in setting parking policies.
- Ensuring integrated and accessible transportation options are readily available for Seattle’s growing population.
- Managing on- and off-street parking most efficiently.
- Achieving better quality, more secure, and more comfortable bicycle storage facilities, and aiding availability of bicycling options, to facilitate mobility.
- Achieving local and regional environmental objectives through sound choices to achieve air quality, climate change, and natural environmental protection goals.

DPD and SDOT Findings

- Starting in 1985, the City has taken a progressive approach to parking strategies, eliminating parking requirements for many uses Downtown. This provides flexibility for builders to tailor the amount of parking provided to suit the needs of the residents.
- The flexible approach to parking was expanded over time so that new development is not required to provide parking in Urban Centers, light rail station areas, and most parts of Urban Villages (on sites within a 1/4 mile walk of a stop with frequent transit service).
- Frequent transit service (FTS) is defined in the Land Use Code: at least 15-minute service for at least 12 hours six days per week, and at least 30-minute service for 18 hours of every day. Metro uses a similar but more accommodating “average headway” measure that describes four evenly-spaced trips per hour, for example, in its Service Plan.
- In areas where the flexible parking approach applies, about 75% of new residential development under review or permitted over the last three years have included parking: 52 of 219 development projects provided no parking, representing about 2,400 dwelling units out of a total of nearly 19,000 dwelling units. The average amount of parking provided is about 0.55 spaces per dwelling unit. *See Attachment for more information.*
- Development with reduced or no parking is clustering in preferred growth areas including Capitol Hill and other center city neighborhoods, as well as the University District and Ballard. This development includes micro-housing and studio apartments (relatively affordable housing).
- Providing parking adds significantly to housing construction costs and ultimately the affordability of housing. A parking space in a structure can cost \$20,000-50,000/space. *See Attachment for more information.*
- Requiring developers to provide parking in areas well served by transit and other transportation options is inconsistent with City policies to reduce single-occupant vehicle (SOV) trips.
- Since the Mayor and Council requested the parking review, the following have occurred:
 - Proposition 1 (the Seattle Transportation Benefit District) passed, funding bus service to improve coverage on many routes.
 - In response to a Hearing Examiner ruling, the FTS Director’s Rule will be updated, resulting in a standard that is more restrictive, with parking required of more new housing development. A code amendment may be desired to apply a more reasonable and easy-to-use approach, which is consistent with SDOT and Metro definitions.

- Discussion at the Mayor’s Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda work group has recognized that parking is a significant factor affecting housing construction costs and affordability. It is also recognized, however, that not all savings will go to the renter.
- *Move Seattle* was recently introduced, identifying priority projects and programs to improve transportation across the city, and seeking to respond to technology opportunities, climate change, and current trends.
- The current approach to on-street parking management encompasses several strategies: use of 31 restricted parking zones (RPZs) with permits for residents but limits on other public parking, plus two other areas addressing Husky football game-days; on-street paid parking with performance-based pricing based on a target level of parking availability; other places that are free but with signed time limits; and a variety of commercial and passenger loading zones.
- Neighborhoods have raised concerns about on-street parking congestion. However, it is not likely that establishing new off-street parking requirements would have a noticeable effect on on-street parking in a number of areas because there is no mechanism to compel people to park off-street when on-street parking is much less expensive. In other areas, parking congestion has been an issue for many years, so is not likely to change.
- Proposition 1 is funding six years of expanded transit service, more than 200,000 additional hours annually, that is being directed toward increasing peak hour service (alleviating bus overcrowding), improving non-peak hour service, and improving reliability of service to numerous local and commuter oriented bus routes.
- Free-floating car share program expansion has allowed 750 free-floating vehicles with an additional 300-400 coming in the next several months.
- New taxi and Transportation Network Company legislation has facilitated thousands of new service providers for on-demand transportation through taxis, Uber, Lyft, etc.
- Pronto Cycle Share has launched with 50 stations and 500 bicycles in the University District, Eastlake, South Lake Union, Belltown, Downtown, Pioneer Square, the International District, Capitol Hill and First Hill. In addition, the 2015 budget included \$600,000 that, combined with an anticipated CMAQ grant award, will bring 12-15 new stations to the Central District, Little Saigon and Yesler Terrace areas.
- The Transportation Levy to fund *Move Seattle* was launched and includes a draft proposal for a \$900 million levy. The proposal aims to improve safety and mobility for all travelers – people walking, biking, driving cars, moving freight, and taking transit.

Best Practices

National experts on transportation policy offer best practices for growing urban areas. Findings include:

- ***Take steps to aid housing affordability by limiting the financial impacts of parking on housing:*** By consuming space and adding costs of \$20,000-50,000 or more per space, a study done for the City of Portland, OR concluded that garage parking adds \$500/month per unit to low-rise apartments on a typical 10,000 square foot lot, with the garage consuming space for 6-8 dwelling units.
- ***Avoid requiring excess parking:*** Providing more parking than is needed adds costs to housing development; the average building provides 30% too much parking to serve its demands, according to King County’s “Right Size Parking” study.

- **Manage on-street parking:** Pricing and time limit strategies are effective tools to manage parking demand.
- **Requirements for off-street parking artificially support driving:** Minimum parking requirements can discourage adoption of other transportation options, and add to congestion in areas where there is not enough right-of-way to support additional vehicles.
- **Requiring more off-street parking does not directly lead to less on-street parking demand:** Resistance to paying for parking means that drivers will typically favor the usually cheaper on-street parking. Requiring more parking off-street is likely to contribute to excesses of unused parking and consumption of space that eliminates housing opportunities.
- **Increasing access to and knowledge about transportation helps people choose from a variety of convenient and affordable options:** As the reliability, proximity, and convenience of transit and shared services increase, people will choose transit and other options that increase mobility and put less strain on their personal budgets.
- **Housing and transportation costs are the greatest burdens on household budgets:** Personal living costs involve both housing and transportation. In Seattle, these costs consume around 46% of the average household income. Many choose longer suburban commutes with higher transportation costs that ultimately consume personal income and take away from any savings in housing cost. Our plans already encourage growth of affordable housing near transit as a fundamental “smart growth” principle of transit-oriented development and growth management. This gives choices that help control both housing and transportation costs, as well as a host of public infrastructure costs. See the City’s Comprehensive Plan, Puget Sound Regional Council’s “Growing Transit Communities” and Vision 2040.
- **Equitable approaches that provide transportation options make a real difference for those who most need those choices:** Transit and other mobility choices should be available and convenient throughout the city. Otherwise people are left without options, or they will choose driving despite higher monetary costs, due to time savings. This most dramatically impacts lower-income households.
- **Use a combination of strategies:** Any effective policies will need to use several strategies, including: actively managing on-street parking rates, managing the terms of restricted parking zones (RPZs), promoting shared parking concepts, defining parking maximums, and other innovative strategies not yet being used.

Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington DC have pursued these kinds of strategies toward promoting transportation, parking and personal mobility efficiencies. Of the range of strategies, Seattle already implements several such as: managing the price of on-street parking, managing Restricted Parking Zones (RPZs), promoting transportation options, and allowing off-street parking to be tailored to serve the residents of new development.

Preliminary Recommendations

DPD and SDOT are recommending the following:

1. Maintain current approach to allow the amount of parking provided to be tailored to serve the residents of new development in areas with frequent transit service (generally Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and light rail station areas).
2. Require a “residential transportation options program” that includes requirements for multi-family building owners to provide transit passes and other mobility options for residents of new buildings.

3. Clarify frequent transit service in the Land Use Code by adopting a map to show where parking is not required, providing more predictability for permit applicants, neighbors and DPD staff. This map would be periodically updated to respond to changes in transit service.
4. Remove code barriers to shared parking options, and address garage design to facilitate shared use parking. Consider code revisions to allow bike share and car share in-lieu of required parking.
5. Update bicycle parking code requirements citywide, to better address secure, comfortable, long-term bicycle parking needs (residential and non-residential uses).
6. Review residential parking conditions and identify methods to better manage on- and off-street use in residential areas. Identify RPZ program demand management strategies.

Require transit passes and other transportation options for new residential development.

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

- Create a “residential transportation options program” that would apply to residential uses in new development in places with no minimum parking requirement (Urban Centers, Urban Villages, and light rail station area overlay districts).
- Require that new residential development participate in a residential-based transit pass program as provided by King County Metro.
 - Terms of participation will be fleshed out, with respect to how many options, chosen by which parties (land owners, homeowners associations), for how long, and subsidy levels, for example.
 - Also include in this program enrollment in car share and bike share programs, and guaranteed ride home services.

The ongoing rollout of expanded free-floating car share, Pronto bike share, taxi and Transportation Network Company services means there are more mobility choices than ever. *Move Seattle* and Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan include a focus on creating a connected, affordable, and multimodal approach to transportation in the city. King County Metro is now also offering a residential ORCA-like pass program that provides passes through building managers/owners to residents at group rates. Recognizing that future development will continue to generate new residents, new development can and should assist in facilitating transportation options that further the City’s goals related to livability and affordability. Actual costs of this type of program will be a small fraction of the cost of building new parking.

Clarify use of frequent transit service as the basis for parking regulations

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

- Clarify the frequent transit service definition to accommodate slight variations in transit service, to use a functionally equivalent service standard (such as four bus trips per hour) to address minor gaps of one to three minutes greater than the currently defined 15 minutes.
- Include a map in the Land Use Code to define the area with frequent transit service, rather than require detailed calculations for each project.

- Explore other Code changes to recognize how transit service from multiple routes, heading in the same general direction, may be recognized as providing actual frequent transit service opportunities.

The proposed changes to frequent transit service would make the Code consistent with definitions used by King County Metro and SDOT for transportation planning purposes.

Promote shared parking options, bike share facilities, and garage design oriented to car share use

POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

- Amend the Code to add additional opportunities to share off-street parking among users to ease demands on neighborhood parking.
- Define standards or guidelines for parking facilities that will accommodate multiple user parking options while maintaining security for residents.
- Incorporate into the Code specifications for bike share stations on private property.
- Amend the Code to allow bike share and car share in-lieu of required parking.

The Land Use Code currently includes a number of parking types (shared, cooperative, off-site). There are opportunities to simplify rules and better define how garages may be designed in the future to securely host varied types of parking.

Update bicycle parking requirements to better address secure, comfortable, long-term bicycle parking needs

POTENTIAL STRATEGY

- In line with recommendations from the Bicycle Master Plan, amend the Code to bring more consistency to requirements across the city, specify long-term bicycle parking requirements citywide, and better define design, security and comfort provisions.

Current bicycle parking requirements vary in their level of detail, and apply differently to uses across various zone designations. Bicycle parking is defined only for a few land use types, and does not specify long-term versus short-term bicycle parking amounts. Also, guidance for the quality, security and comfort of bicycle parking facilities can be improved.

Review and identify new on- and off-street parking management strategies in residential neighborhoods. Review the RPZ program to identify demand management tools.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY

- In 2015, SDOT will examine the RPZ permit program and develop recommendations:
 - Tailor strategies for different neighborhoods.

- Set performance benchmarks such as seeking a targeted level of parking occupancy per district.

As Seattle grows, and new multifamily buildings add density and affordable options to historically low-density neighborhoods, there can be increased competition for curb space and on-street parking. While multi-family residential buildings often have off-street parking, it is often underused due to the price comparison between on-street and off-street parking options. Further, two-year RPZ permits are priced at \$65 or less and households are allowed multiple permits. One way to handle this issue is to identify demand management strategies that will address the increased competition for the limited curb space. This could include incentives for giving up a vehicle, limiting the number of permits, examining permit pricing, or other strategies.

Next Steps

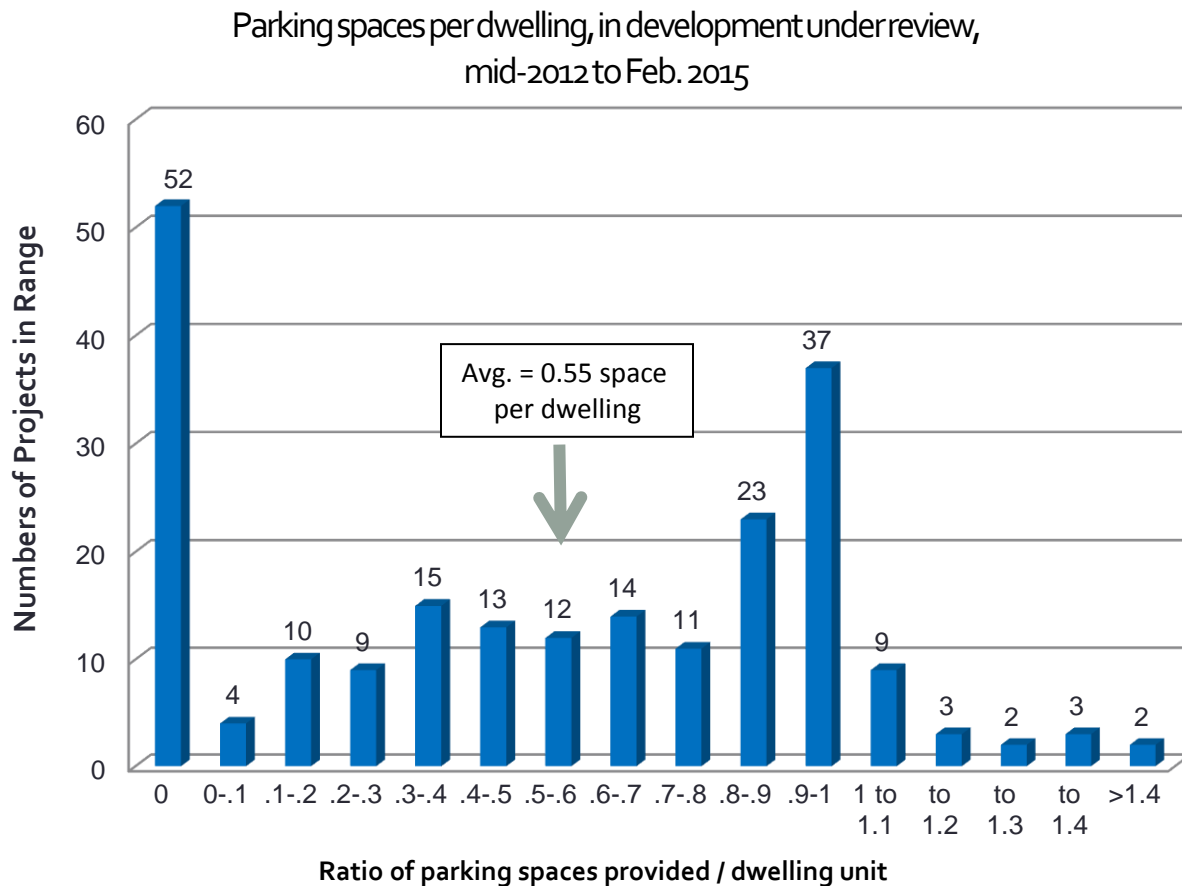
We anticipate discussing these recommendations with the City Council Planning Land Use and Sustainability Committee (PLUS) in May 2015. Depending on direction from the Mayor and Council, DPD and SDOT could develop legislation to implement these proposals, using a public process, for Council consideration by the end of 2015.

ATTACHMENTS

Development Permitting and Parking Data, mid-2012 to February 2015

DPD staff reviewed data on residential development proposals permitted or under review since mid-2012, to identify trends in parking provision since the latest changes to parking regulations that enabled flexibility in amount of parking provided. This addresses approximately 219 development proposals in locations within Urban Centers, light rail station areas, and parts of Urban Villages within 1/4 mile of frequent transit service.

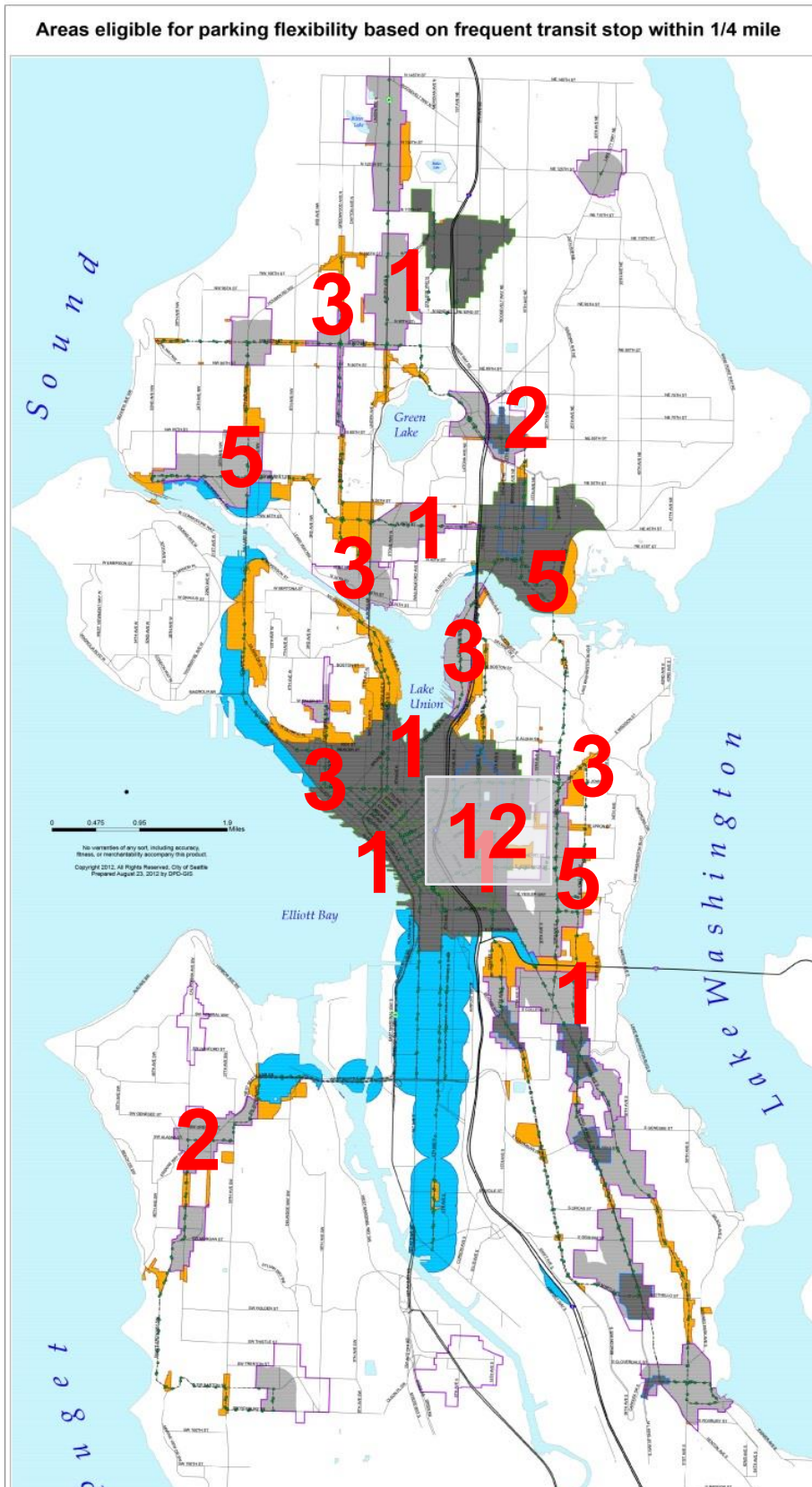
The chart below summarizes the findings on how much parking has been proposed, in terms of spaces provided per dwelling unit (or per bedroom for congregate residences).



- The data show that 52 of 219 developments have proposed no parking, a rate of approximately 25%, while 75% of proposals include parking, as illustrated in the chart above.
- The average parking rate proposed in new development equals 0.55 parking space per dwelling unit.
- Approximately 13 of these developments with no parking are congregate residences.
- The data illustrate a range of choices made by developers, including many providing close to 1 parking space per dwelling, and most between 0.3 and 1 space per dwelling. This kind of tailoring was an intended outcome of the City's policy.
- The average size of these developments without parking is 51 units, and about 60% are in multi-family zones while 40% are in commercial zones.
- The full list of developments evaluated here includes approximately 19,000 dwellings.

Development Projects With No Parking, Under Review since June 2012

Red numbers are the count of development projects with no parking that are under review or permitted, from June 2012–February 2015. Light grey areas are urban villages. Darker grey areas are urban centers and light rail station areas. Orange areas are outside urban villages but near frequent transit, where 50% reduction in minimum parking is possible. Blue areas are industrial zoned (non-residential uses): 50% reduction from minimum parking is possible with performance.



Parking Policy Best Practices Categories

The following best practices are drawn from expert advice given to governments around the country addressing similar issues of parking management and its relationship to broader transportation and growth planning objectives. See links at http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/parking/ including “Parking/Code Guidance: Case Studies and Model Provisions” for the Bay Area’s Metropolitan Transportation Commission (Nelson Nygaard, Dyett & Bhatia, 2012), and also an analysis for Washington D.C. summarized at <http://greatergreater.com/files/200802/nnzoningparking.pdf>.

1. **Reduce or eliminate unnecessary parking requirements**
2. **Facilitate shared parking**
3. **Promote transportation options**
4. **Establish residential parking maximums**
5. **Adopt additional parking management strategies (unbundle apartment rent from parking rent, discount transit passes, bicycle parking, car share parking)**
6. **Price on-street and off-street parking for optimal use and turnover**
7. **Adopt an on-street parking availability target**
8. **Manage parking to achieve the availability target using pricing, time limits**
9. **Manage parking impact in neighborhoods with restricted parking zones (RPZs)**

The City of Seattle already pursues several of these strategies, accommodates shared parking in the Land Use Code, and uses parking maximums sparingly – primarily in the Downtown zones. These policies are recommended for the Bay Area as a multi-point program for parking reform that aligns with smart growth objectives and transit-oriented development principles. Their effect would be to encourage transportation choices that increase transportation system efficiency, and to make the best use of available parking resources.

Summary of Findings: *Cost of On-Site Parking and Impacts on Affordability (2012)*
Portland, Oregon Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.
 See <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/420062>

A 2012 study for Portland, Oregon’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability examined the relationship between parking, housing and rent costs. It compared construction costs and resulting effect on rents for mixed-use buildings with and without parking. This included a variety of parking styles both at and below ground level for a typical 10,000 square foot lot.¹

The study found a significant added housing cost due to parking, and a reduced amount of housing that could be provided due to space consumed for parking.

- Compared to an \$800/month rent per unit in an apartment building with no parking, a building with underground parking would require rent of \$1,300/month to cover development costs, including garage construction at an assumed \$55,000 per parking space.
- Compared to 50 dwelling units in the building with no parking, there would be space enough for only 44 dwelling units in the underground-parked building.
- For a building where parking is provided inside but not underground, the comparable rent would need to be \$950/month, with room for a total of 42 dwelling units.
- For a building with mechanical parking solutions that maximizes space efficiency (by stacking cars in lifts), the comparable rent to cover costs would need to be \$1,175/month, with room for a total of 46 dwelling units.

Building Development Prototype	Number of units possible to fit in the structure	Number of parking Spaces	Parking spaces per unit	Monthly rent to meet 7% ROI* (lesser profit objective)	Monthly rent to meet 10 % ROI* (greater profit objective)
No Parking	50	0	0	\$800	\$1,150
Underground	44	33	0.75	\$1,300	\$1,900
Podium (at or above ground)	42	22	0.5	\$950	\$1,350
Mechanical	46	23	0.5	\$1,175	\$1,660
Surface	30	19	0.6	\$1,200	\$1,800

*ROI = return on investment. The ROI factor is the assumed percent return that can be achieved from a development. This table illustrates that rents are sensitive to: how many dwellings can be fit into a given property, the developer’s “bottom line” profit expectations, and the costs of building parking as part of the total construction cost.

¹ Other development assumptions, such as unit size at 550 square feet/unit, and amount of area for internal hallways, etc., were standardized according to zoning that is comparable to Seattle’s NC zones. Construction costs were assumed at \$109 per square foot, or about \$60,000 construction cost per dwelling unit.