



Policy Memo: Eliminating Parking Minimums

The City of Syracuse should replace the word “required” wherever it appears in Section 4.4C of its Zoning Ordinance (Minimum Required Off-Street Parking Spaces) with the word “recommended”. Additionally, paragraph (1) under Section 4.4B (Applicability) should be replaced in its entirety with language similar to the following: “Every building or land use established, every existing building enlarged, and every existing use expanded shall provide off-street parking and loading areas sufficient to meet the demand created by such building or land use, in accordance with the minimum parking recommendations set forth in subsection 4.4C, Minimum Recommended Off-Street Parking Spaces.”

Overview:

The Syracuse Zoning Ordinance requires every new or expanded building or land use to provide off-street parking and loading areas in accordance with minimum parking requirements. The stated goals of the minimum parking requirements are “Encouraging multi-modal transportation options and enhanced pedestrian safety; providing methods to help reduce stormwater runoff and the heat island effect of large paved parking areas; and providing flexible methods of responding to the transportation and access demands of various land uses in different areas of the City.” All three of these goals can most effectively be met by minimum required off-street parking spaces with recommended minimums.

As acknowledged in the Syracuse Comprehensive Plan 2040, the prevalence of surface parking lots in the City reduces both the visual appeal of the streetscape and the taxable value of real estate. The Comprehensive Plan also states a goal of right-sizing transportation infrastructure. Because minimum parking requirements are based on a one-size-fits-all approach, they can result in overbuilding of off-street parking in some contexts where less parking may be required. This forced oversupply both drives up the cost of development, particularly residential development, and lowers the overall value of real estate in the City. Moreover, it discourages the use of multimodal transportation and active transportation while encouraging an over-reliance on private automobiles.

The removal of parking minimums has been successfully implemented in cities of varying sizes and characters. The City of Buffalo, NY, eliminated parking minimums in 2017 and found that the number of new off-street parking spaces decreased significantly compared with previous years; notably, the decrease was entirely driven by mixed-use developments, while single-use residential, commercial, and civic developments exceeded the previous parking minimums. This outcome demonstrates that eliminating parking minimums does not encourage developers to under-build parking; instead, it allows them to plan for actual market conditions based on the specific context of each site.



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As the City of Syracuse works on multiple fronts to increase housing supply and affordability, improve public transportation services, and enhance pedestrian and bike infrastructure throughout the City, eliminating parking minimums can allow private developers to adapt more smoothly to changing conditions and create cycles of positive feedback. Replacing required parking minimums with recommendations will help Syracuse stay flexible and adaptable as it moves into a vibrant, livable future.