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As More Cities Eliminate Parking Minimums, What Happens Next?

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By: Robert Ferrin



With fewer parking spaces, the curb becomes valuable real estate for drivers looking to park or drop off passengers, as well as for e-commerce deliveries.

Creative solutions and community engagement are crucial when dealing with changes to parking policies.

Minimum parking requirements, which require building owners to provide a fixed number of parking spaces, have played a key role in American municipal policy since the 1920s. Following their widespread adoption in the 1960s, these laws significantly impacted the design of cities and strongly contributed to the growth of a car-centric culture. Today, there are an estimated two billion parking spaces in the U.S., according to a March article in the New York Times.

[In 2017, Buffalo, New York, ushered in a new era when it became the first major U.S. city to abolish parking minimums](#). Minneapolis, Raleigh, San Jose and others followed. And at the beginning of 2023, California became the first state to abolish parking minimums for developments located near public transportation routes.

Affordable housing, transit and environmental advocates celebrated these policy changes. They point to lower development costs, improved walkability and increased multimodal transportation, which reduces carbon emissions and vehicle congestion. Together, they can help municipalities meet their climate action goals.

But what does the end of parking minimums mean for urban development? What should policymakers consider as they contemplate parking reforms? And what tools can cities introduce to manage parking demand and support new policies?

Developers Gain Flexibility to Rethink Parking Needs

Every municipality has unique geographical, historical, cultural and economic factors that influence parking requirements. This is why parking is probably the most varied aspect of municipal zoning codes. Additionally, parking codes often conflict with policy goals that promote mixed-use, dense and walkable areas.

Despite that, there is strong evidence that eliminating minimum parking requirements can help reduce costs for developers. For example, **Rob McConnell**, a vice president at engineering firm WGI, [told the New York Times in March](#) that creating a single spot in a basic, stand-alone parking structure can cost up to \$28,000. Getting rid of parking minimums can also help streamline the entitlement process by reducing the amount of time and resources required to secure approvals.

In addition to reducing costs, the absence of parking minimums can give developers more design flexibility and allow space to be used more efficiently. This lets developers redefine their parking needs for today and into the future.

To do so, they should:

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other transportation demand management tools, including shared mobility programs, infrastructure for bicycles and electric vehicles, and electric vehicle charging stations.

- Abolishing mandatory parking minimums does not remove the need for parking. Vehicle access remains critical to the success of many projects, especially in areas that aren't walkable or well served by public transportation.

Policymakers Can Leverage Parking Reform for Holistic Improvements

Consider a city manager whose neighboring town just abolished parking minimums. Within days, their phone is ringing off the hook, and developers and officials are asking when the city will also end parking minimums. How should a policymaker proceed?

First, abolishing minimum parking requirements should not be done in a vacuum. In most communities, many employment opportunities, services, retail options and homes are only accessible via parking. Additionally, eliminating parking minimums could increase congestion and traffic in many areas.

Instead, efforts to eliminate parking minimums could begin by evaluating:

- Complementary initiatives such as demand-based pricing for on-street and off-street parking, which would support abolishing minimum parking requirements;
- Investments to increase residents' mobility options;
- Current work on a strategic transportation plan to rethink mobility locally and regionally;
- Barriers to building affordable housing, as well as urban infill and mixed-use development;
- Sustainable community growth.

Second, identify internal and external stakeholders who will champion new parking policies. This will reveal how parking reforms can lead to other zoning code changes that meet broader initiatives and policy goals. Developers can play a key role in this process.

Third, consider other transportation reforms for the jurisdiction. Abolishing parking minimums is only one option. Analyze the impact of electric vehicle adoption and charging infrastructure. Solicit community feedback from developers, neighborhood associations, property managers and advocacy groups for initiatives such as transit-oriented development and improved public transportation.

The Evolution of Curb Space Usage

Consumer habits — most recently demand for e-commerce deliveries and new mobility options such as e-bikes and electric scooters — have changed curb access. Abolishing parking minimums further complicates negotiations over curb space usage. Among other things, reducing the number of parking spaces increases competition for the curb from motorists looking to park or drop off passengers and e-commerce drivers looking for places to unload their packages.

However, abolishing minimum parking requirements can open opportunities to rethink vehicular and non-vehicular curb space usage. This could include prioritizing multimodal transportation or designing flexible curbs that morph from loading zones to short-term parking depending on the time of day.

Regardless of which path is selected regarding parking minimums, developers, policymakers and municipal operators will need creativity and community engagement to best implement reforms for local needs.

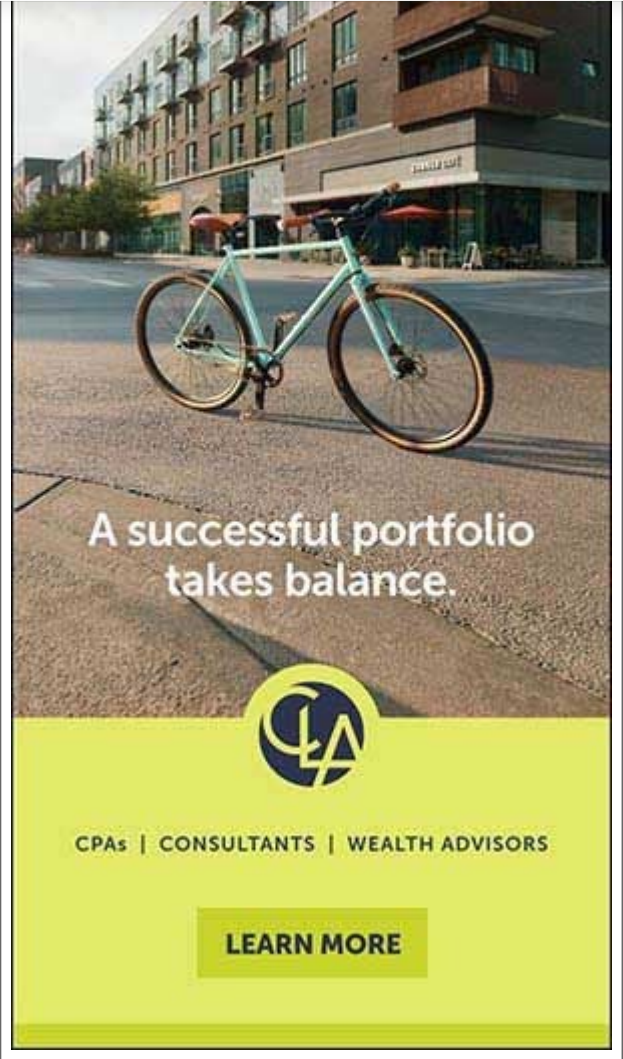
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