Parking Strategies

Value Added

Regulatory improvements that encourage shared, on-street, and structured parking can improve community livability and make more efficient use of land.

In "built-out" communities, surface parking is probably one of the largest single land uses, even though it is not recognized as a land use in its own right. In many older suburban areas, 85 percent of developed land is devoted to surface parking lots. Furthermore, at any given time, most parking spaces are empty. The Victoria Transport Policy Institute found that parking utilization rates averaged only 48 percent for a wide range office buildings, shopping plazas, and big box retail uses.

There are several concerns associated with parking areas:

- Surface parking lots have a strong and negative impact on walkability.
- Paved parking and driveway surfaces are among the highest sources of urban stormwater runoff, a leading cause of degraded surface water quality and soil erosion.
- Surface parking is often a flat, dull, formless, and colorless space in the urban scene.

There are several ways for communities to reduce the impacts of surface parking through improved zoning regulations. The approach includes (1) reducing the visual and environmental impact of surface parking areas, (2) reducing the number of vehicle parking spaces needed, and (3) providing incentives for provision of structured parking. Three effective strategies for meeting these considerations include on-street parking, shared parking, and structured parking.

On-street parking facilitates a safe and attractive pedestrian environment.

On-Street Parking

When on-street parking spaces can be provided, the zoning ordinance may allow a reduction in the number of off-street parking spaces required. Typically, the credit for on-street parking spaces applies to all or a portion of the number of on-street spaces located directly along the frontage of a specific building or use. In a mixed-use district, the policy would be to allocate off-street parking credits for all on-street parking spaces within the entire district, so long as they are within convenient walking distance (such as 500 feet) from the doorway of the use claiming the credit.

On-street parking is a highly efficient form of parking because the typical on-street parking space requires only about half the land that the typical space in a surface parking lot requires. On-street parking provides the following additional benefits to redeveloping areas:

- Improved street-level retail activity – provides a cheap and convenient supply of parking for street-oriented businesses.
- Allows pricing of parking supply – can easily be metered and meters can be adjusted over time for greater efficiency.

- Traffic calming and pedestrian safety – off-street parking reduces the speed of vehicular traffic in areas that should be focused on pedestrian-oriented activities.

Disadvantages of on-street parking include:

- Takes place in street rights-of-way.
- Requires public enforcement resources to deter crime and unauthorized use.
- Needs to be coordinated with the locations of transit bus stops and bicycle lanes.
- Vehicular/ Bicycle/ Pedestrian conflict with passing traffic as pedestrians exit their cars.

Parking Structures

Structured parking dramatically changes land use, density, and walkability of mixed-use districts. A deck can be placed under buildings, out of sight, or constructed at several levels in height and use only a small fraction of the site – less than 15 percent in most cases. The remaining land area can be filled with mixed-use buildings that are closely spaced. The spaces between buildings are no longer needed for parking, so they are filled with things people like: landscaping, sidewalks, plazas, and outdoor cafes. Special design and regulatory incentives can also help make structured parking more feasible and attractive. These include shared parking ordinances and a density bonus for structured parking.

Incentive density bonus for parking structures

The City of Marietta, GA allows a developer a bonus of 350 sq. ft. of additional building floor space for each parking space in a parking structure that will be available for public use.

Improving the aesthetics of parking structures

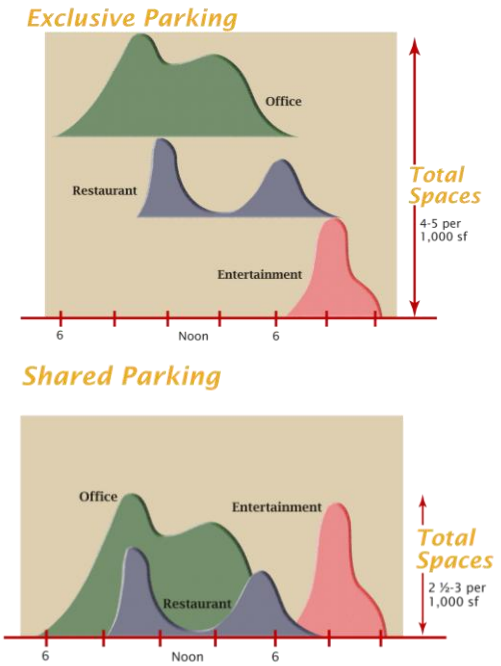
Parking decks can be hidden behind retail fronts or designed with facades that match office and retail buildings on the same block.

Constructing and financing public parking structures

Because parking structures can spur economic development and improve walkability, some communities have constructed public parking structures in central locations where redevelopment is desired.

Shared Parking

Shared parking allows developers to count spaces provided by another nearby land use towards their minimum parking requirements if the two uses have different peak usage times. For example, most office workers go home in the evenings, just as the peak parking demand is being felt for restaurants and entertainment uses. If these uses were each required to meet their peak parking requirements, then a number of the parking spaces would be idle during some or all of the day; however, if they shared the same parking, the two uses would need fewer total spaces because many of the spaces could be used for office workers during the day and restaurant goers during the evening.



Combining several uses with staggered hours of peak parking demand creates a more efficient parking environment if regulated well.

Other Tactics

- Invest in infrastructure for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit to minimize vehicle parking demands.
- Provide bicycle racks, transit shelters, and other facilities to facilitate other transportation modes.
- Encourage mixed-use development so that shared parking is practical.