

January 16, 2024

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

ZTA 23-10 – Parking, Queuing, and Loading – Calculation of Required Parking (Support)

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the Washington DC region advocating for walkable, bikeable, and transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for our region to grow and provide opportunities for all. **CSG strongly supports ZTA 23-10.** We also recommend that you extend the range of application for Metro stations from ½ mile to 1 mile.

Minimum parking mandates reflect outdated priorities—and continuing to follow this outdated policy has real costs for Montgomery County.

In some of our county’s most desirable areas with great access to public transit, scarce land and resources are currently devoted to mandated parking that can far exceed what residents actually need. Parking construction frequently costs tens of thousands of dollars *per spot*, and these costs are then passed on to all residents in higher rents.¹

Eliminating mandatory parking minimums in locations with great access to transit is a common-sense fix. It aligns our parking policies with the goals of the Thrive 2050 General Plan, and will create more affordable housing opportunities and provide more options for sustainable living.

Equity, affordability, and housing supply

Eliminating minimum parking mandates near transit supports the production of lower-cost market-rate housing as well as more deeply subsidized affordable housing than is currently feasible due to parking construction costs. Additionally, it will be possible to build a great number of units—space that would have been used to house cars can instead provide homes for people.

¹ See [Parking Requirement Impacts on Housing Affordability](#) report, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, November 2023, for additional details and figures: “*Parking minimums impose large costs on many households, particularly lower-income households that want to live in high-opportunity urban neighborhoods where commonly-used services and jobs are accessible without driving. [...] Several studies demonstrate that housing with off-street parking really does cost more than otherwise comparable homes that do not.*”

This will provide more equitable access to housing in some of our county's most desirable, high-opportunity areas, and allow the county to make higher-impact investments in subsidized affordable housing near Metro, the Purple Line, and future BRT lines.

Communities like Buffalo, Seattle and Minneapolis are already reaping the benefits of eliminating minimum parking mandates, and are seeing increased housing production at levels of affordability that would not have been possible prior to parking reforms.

- In Buffalo, 68% of housing units built following the citywide elimination of parking requirements were located in buildings that would not have been legal to build under previous parking requirements. Removing parking requirements had the greatest impact on increased housing production in transit-rich locations.²
- In the first five years after Seattle eliminated parking reforms near transit, new housing included 40% less parking than would have previously been allowed, saving an estimated 144 acres of land and \$537 million in construction costs that otherwise would have been passed on to tenants.³
- In Minneapolis, reduced parking minimums for new housing near transit led to new market-rate studio apartments being offered for under \$1000 per month, compared to a typical price of \$1200 per month.⁴

Choice and fairness

Not everybody wants to own a car due to the high costs, hassle, and health and environmental impacts, and in areas with great public transportation, many people do not need them. People may choose not to own a car due to age, ability, income, or personal preference.

However, under current minimum parking mandates, everyone is paying for the construction of mandated parking spaces associated with residential buildings through elevated housing costs—whether they need the parking or not.

This zoning text amendment would allow people to choose to live in our county's vibrant, transit-rich communities without being forced to pay a premium on their housing costs for mandated parking they do not want or need.

Efficiency and market-based allocation of parking

Under this measure, parking provided for new housing would be determined by demand rather than being tied to a costly and arbitrary minimum. In walkable areas well-connected to transit, the amount of parking needed is often lower than current regulations. In locations with ample public garage space or private garages available for sharing, some buildings may not need dedicated parking at all.

² ["Parking Reform Legalized Most of the New Homes in Buffalo and Seattle,"](#) Sightline Institute, April 2023. ["Driving Change Through Parking,"](#) American Planning Association, January 2022.

³ ["Shifting gears: Parking reform gains traction,"](#) Congress for the New Urbanism, November 2022.

["Parking Reform \[...\]"](#), Sightline, April 2023.

⁴ ["People Over Parking,"](#) American Planning Association, October 2018.

Critically, eliminating minimum parking mandates does not mean that *no* parking can be built, but that the amount of parking that is built is better suited to residents' needs and market demand —potentially yielding major cost savings and offering people greater choice in where and how they live.

Examples from other jurisdictions give insight into how this can work:

- In Seattle, 70% of new housing continued to voluntarily include on-site parking—sometimes at a lower level than was previously required—in areas where parking minimums were eliminated. Overall, the 40% reduction in parking spaces across new housing versus previous requirements aligned with a previous study finding that 40% of the parking spaces in King County, where Seattle is located, are never used.⁵
- Buffalo shows the efficiency benefits of eliminating minimum parking mandates rather than merely allowing exemptions through variances. In the six months prior to the elimination of parking mandates, one-third of new homes were permitted with below-minimum parking. Following the elimination of parking mandates, the proportion of new homes with parking below previous minimums rose to two-thirds.⁶

We believe that extending the range of application from ½ to 1 mile from Metro stations will allow for additional flexibility and reductions by the market in neighborhoods with good walkability, bike-friendliness, street networks and accessibility to services, and that parking will continue to be provided in these locations proportionate to residents' needs.

Climate and sustainable transportation goals

Minimum parking mandates are a legacy of car-centric design, designed to accommodate driving as the default mode of transportation. This no longer reflects our county's climate, equity, and land use priorities.

Removing mandatory parking minimums in locations with great access to transit complements our county's investments in more frequent transit, protected bike lanes and bike sharing, and safer walking throughout the county. It is a core part of reducing vehicle trips, vehicle miles traveled, and greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful pollutants.⁷

In conclusion, this ZTA advances the county's goals in Thrive 2050, our climate plan, and our equity goals, and we strongly urge support.

Thank you,



Carrie Kisicki
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⁵ ["Parking Reform \[...\]"](#), Sightline, April 2023.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ["Parking Requirement Impacts on Housing Affordability"](#), VTPI, November 2023, p. 6-7.