

MEMORANDUM

To: Covington Team

From: Thomas Brennan, Nelson\Nygaard

Subject: Covington Downtown Parking Concepts for Zoning Memo

This memo recommends interim minimum parking requirements for downtown zones and suggests that the City of Covington phase out minimum parking requirements in code and implement alternative means of managing on and off-street parking for all zones in the downtown area. These include strategies such as (1) imposition of time-limits for on-street parking to ensure availability for shoppers and residents, (2) establishment of residential permit parking zones, and (3) assessment of in-lieu parking fees, which can fund the construction or lease of shared off-street parking in the downtown area. Each of these strategies need only be pursued if and when parking studies indicate that demand for on-street parking exceeds, or is likely to exceed supply in the near future.

An appropriate time frame for the elimination of parking minimums would need to be set based on expected market uptake. During the interim period, we recommend that the City pursue alternative parking management strategies (1) through (3) above as appropriate, and establish interim parking requirements of *2 parking space per 1,000 square feet of non-residential uses and 1 parking space per 1,500 square feet of residential uses for all zones in the downtown area*. These requirements are based on the findings of observations of parking demand in Main Street Districts, cited in Figure 1 below, but should be amended if parking occupancy data for downtown Covington is available or collected. The market types between various zones are not significant enough to justify varying parking requirements for each zone designation, particularly if shared parking opportunities are promoted.

To (a) inform the design of alternative parking management strategies, (b) establish interim off-street parking requirements, including maximums for selected areas, consistent with actual observed demand in Covington, (c) identify opportunities for shared parking, and (d) create a baseline for future evaluation and adjustment of policies, we recommend that the City conduct a series of parking occupancy surveys of both on and off-street parking in the downtown area in the near future.

Background:

Origin of Minimum Parking Requirements

Between the 1940s and 1970s, many cities adopted minimum off-street parking requirements with the intent of preventing the parking demand generated by one land use or property from congesting on-street parking and/or reducing accessibility to adjacent properties and land uses. However, minimum

off-street parking requirements are an expensive and inefficient way to manage on and off-street parking demand, and produce unwanted side effects that are in direct conflict with the established vision for more pedestrian-oriented and transit-friendly downtowns, such that of Covington.

Effects of Minimum Parking Requirements

The effects of minimum off-street parking requirements include the following:

- **Reduce streetscape quality.** A great street is defined by activity, street-facing windows, and interesting facades. Excessive off-street parking located between buildings can disrupt the quality of such streetscapes.
- **Promote auto traffic.** Minimum parking requirements are generally set at a level that assumes everyone drives. This effectively creates unlimited supply which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy where everyone *will* drive.
- **Reduce development feasibility.** For small infill projects and historic building retrofits, parking requirements often make these projects unattractive or infeasible. In some cases, the required parking may not physically fit on to a site; in other cases it may be too expensive to provide.
- **Discourage innovation.** Car-sharing, cash incentives, subsidized transit passes, secure bike parking, and carpool/vanpool matching services are proven to reduce driving alone. But if the same amount of parking is still required, there is no incentive to use these programs.
- **Reduce density.** Even structured parking takes up physical space that is not available for other uses. Minimum parking requirements reduce the number of units or floor area by 20% or more. Parking often prevents a downtown from achieving the density needed for economic health.
- **Diminish economic vitality.** Downtowns depend on pedestrians and a 'park once' system where people park once and walk to various stores for impulse buys. With on-site parking people drive, park, visit their destination, and go home – eliminating street activity and potential customers.
- **Discourage mixed use development.** With mixed uses, peak parking times often do not coincide. Minimum parking requirements assume that each use has its own supply of parking, which does not allow mixed-use projects to reduce parking in order to offset higher development costs.

Alternatives to Minimum Parking Requirements

There are a variety of effective methods for managing on and off-street parking demand, such as:

- **On-street time limits.** On-street time limits or parking meters (with revenue devoted to downtown improvements) are effective tools to prioritize the most attractive curb spaces for customers, and ensure that these are not occupied by all-day employee parking.
- **Residential permit parking zones.** Residential permit parking controls prioritize curb spaces for residents in neighborhoods. Rather than having separate parking for each development, all uses share a common pool. This can be passed into law in lieu of other requirements.
- **In lieu parking fees.** The city can charge and collect a transportation impact fee *in lieu* of requiring developers to provide off-street parking on site. The fees can be used to build shared public off-street parking or for other transportation improvements.

Parking Maximums as a Major Alternative

Parking maximums limit parking supply at the site level or across an area. Limits imposed by a district or neighborhood are *parking caps*. Either type of maximum can be imposed in addition to or instead of parking minimums. Establishing a maximum allowable amount of parking can prevent developers from building excessively large lots, or limit supply based on road capacity or community priorities.

Communities looking to increase tax revenue through parking lot redevelopment, improve pedestrian safety, or reduce stormwater runoff and heat island impacts of parking may want to consider parking maximums as a way to achieve those goals.

As well, planners can set up parking maximums as transferable parking entitlements, so that the allowed number of parking spaces can be transferred or sold to another development if they are not needed. This allows for area-wide control of parking supply without restricting developments that need more parking. Developments requiring less parking can benefit by selling the rights to their additional spaces.

Peer Models

Many small municipalities with downtowns want to be more dense, vibrant, and walkable and have concluded that the elimination of minimum parking requirements is essential to achieving their goals:

- **Stuart, FL** eliminated all on-site parking requirements, which were preventing developers from renovating existing buildings. After four years, the number of downtown businesses had risen by 348%, and the town was able to lower its tax rate.
- **Greenville, SC** has no parking minimums even though the downtown drive alone commute mode split is 99%. This standard has proven successful regardless of the availability of public transit and without requiring that all off-street parking be provided by the City.

Several mid-size municipalities have introduced parking maximums in exchange for parking minimums:

- **Eugene, OR** introduced maximum parking standards to promote dense mixed-use development. It abolished minimum parking requirements in several districts, which aided historic preservation while also reducing air and water pollution, stormwater run-off, and flooding.
- **Spokane, WA** eliminated minimum downtown parking requirements and introduced parking maximums. On certain streets, surface parking is prohibited between the street and buildings, and at least 50% of parking structure frontage must have street-level retail, office, or civic uses.

Parking Occupancy Studies

In light of these innovative approaches, elimination of parking minimums over time is recommended via an on-street parking occupancy study. An occupancy study will determine current parking demand for existing uses, which allows for setting more sensible requirements. A study will also help to identify opportunities for shared parking in the downtown between existing uses and future uses. For example, instead of requiring each development to include a minimum number of on-site parking spaces regardless of how many people drive, municipalities can provide a common, off-site supply of parking.

The following figure summarizes findings gathered from former parking occupancy studies. The parking demand in the four districts varies between 1.6 and 1.9 spaces per 1,000 square feet of non-residential built area – though most cities require 3-4 spaces.

Figure 1

	City Population	Mode Split							Occupied Parking Spaces per 1,000 Sq.Ft.
		Drove Alone	2 or More Person Carpool	Transit	Bicycle	Walked	Other Means	Worked at Home	
Chico	59,900	61%	12%	1%	11%	13%	1%	1%	1.7
Palo Alto	58,600	80%	9%	4%	3%	3%	1%	0%	1.9
Santa Monica	84,100	74%	11%	11%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1.8
Kirkland, WA	45,600	77%	12%	4%	0%	2%	1%	4%	1.6

The results show that even small cities with high drive alone mode splits can accomplish reduced parking minimums based on measured demand – and that most parking minimums are in excess of real demand. Furthermore, this demonstrates that aggregate parking demand within a main street district is often far below the total amount required for each respective property and land use.

Based on the above information, parking requirements could be set as **2 parking space per 1,000 square feet of non-residential uses** and **1 parking space per 1,500 square feet of residential uses**. But a parking occupancy study should be performed to confirm the rates are indeed appropriate for your community.