



STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

February 21, 2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: February 14, 2024

TITLE: **Consider Parking Standards as Outlined in the General Plan Update.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Council receive a staff report on the parking standards proposed in the General Plan update and consider recommendations of the Planning Commission and public as necessary.

INTRODUCTION:

At its January 3 meeting, the Council outlined several topics it wished to cover before adopting the General Plan. Since that time, the public and Planning Commission have also considered several amendment recommendations. This item will address the parking standards that are in the December 12, 2023, draft General Plan to address the January 3 list of topics, as well as the recommendations that have been made since that time.

BACKGROUND:

The City's update to the General Plan has focused on smart growth policies intended to meet the housing and economic needs of the City while protecting the environment. A central tenant to this approach recognizes the relationship between infill development and alternative transportation. In brief, the reasoning goes, alternative transportation becomes feasible and practicable at higher densities because of the economies of scale achieved with a densification of users clustered around a smaller number of alternative transportation network nodes. Secondly, recognizing that the infrastructure that is built is the infrastructure that will be used leads to an emphasis on policy that emphasizes the infrastructure needed to support alternative modes. In balancing infrastructure for traditional modes (single passenger vehicles) with the desired future state that relies more heavily on alternative modes (mass transit, vehicle share, and non-motorized modes) and the City's housing goals, the policy recommendation is to deemphasize infrastructure for cars (including parking requirements).

DISCUSSION:

Parking Policy

The City has historically been on the leading edge of alternative transportation policy. The City has supported bike infrastructure; despite its size, it operates its own bus system; and it has a long history building bike friendly roads and trails to name a few examples. The City also adopted parking standards in 2008 that were progressive for the time. These involved parking reductions for shared parking, parking maximums of two spaces per unit in residential zones, and zero parking requirements in the downtown Central Commercial district, to name a few.

The Central Commercial parking standards were a template for the infill standard proposed in the General Plan. In the Central Commercial, parking is not required for commercial uses. A mixed-use project is not required to provide parking if the number of residential units is less than seven. For projects that exceed six units, on-site parking is required for one-third of the number of residential units.

To date, only one project has used the Central Commercial parking standard. Sorrel Place is 44 units of affordable housing located at 7th and I Streets. The project was permitted with 14 on-site parking spaces. The project also included bus passes for all the units. The project also included a car share, which has yet to be operationalized. The reductions in private vehicles were offset by alternative transportation incentives and infrastructure. There were concerns about the project's potential to have a negative impact on parking in the area. Since the opening of the development there is still available street parking at all hours of the day in this neighborhood.

The General Plan proposes to take this lesson and expand on it. The Land Use Element includes principles and goals to:

1. Encourage infill development of vacant, brownfield, and underutilized land designated for development as a way of meeting housing and employment needs without major extensions of infrastructure and services. Encourage high-density residential infill development and minimal parking ratios in Infill Opportunity Zones throughout the City. Ensure displacement and affordability issues related to the City's infill strategy are addressed; and
2. Permit vertical and/or horizontal mixed-use development close to clusters of activity and at major transportation crossroads where they can take advantage of higher levels of access.

Policies related to these goals include:

LU-1c Prioritization of transit and active transportation. Reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements citywide.

LU-1d Reduce parking maximums in the most walkable areas of the city. Reduce maximum allowable parking requirements within Infill Opportunity Zones to promote walkable communities. Minimize vehicle parking requirements and maximize walk, bike, and transit infrastructure.

CM-1b Investment in alternative modes. To provide a realistic and cost-effective balance between travel modes, the City shall emphasize investment in alternative modes (bikeways, etc.) as a priority over increasing vehicular capacities of streets. Support ride-share in various modes (car, bike, etc.) through public and private infrastructure, and encourage systems designed to provide access to shared facilities. Improvements and programs should include public options, such as bike share racks or carpool parking, public-private partnerships for vehicle share, and private facilities or programs, such as project-based car share.

CM-1i Balanced transportation system. Create and maintain a balanced transportation system with choice of bus transit, bicycle, and pedestrian as well as car sharing and private automobile modes. Reduce the percentage of trips that are made by automobile and provide the opportunity, incentives, and facilities to divert trips from automobiles to other modes. Provide negative incentives, such as parking meters, permit parking, time limited parking, carpool incentives, and other targeted parking measures that encourage alternative modes utilizing “induced demand” strategies.

CM-2a Land use development patterns. The City encourages and supports travel demand management efforts. The City shall promote land use and development patterns that encourage walking, bicycling and transit use. In recognition of the link between land use and transportation, the land use plan shall discourage low density, homogenous land-use patterns that foster automobile travel and are impractical to serve with transit. Land use planning shall emphasize high density and mixed land-use patterns that translate into higher transit and pedestrian travel in the downtown and neighborhood commercial areas. Infill, redevelopment, and reuse of underutilized property at higher densities shall be encouraged prior to outward expansion of City boundaries. The following land use measures are emphasized:

1. Mixed-use neighborhood centers within transit corridors that include housing and commercial services near employment.
2. Land use patterns that maximize linking trip opportunities by assembling uses, thus allowing people to take care of a variety of daily needs with a single trip.
1. Clustering of higher density housing and incorporation of residential units on upper floors of commercial buildings.
2. Integration of new housing into neighborhood shopping centers, including Sunny Brae, Westwood, and Valley West.
3. Pedestrian-oriented land use and urban design, including the following elements:
 - Pedestrian-scale block patterns.
 - Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle amenities into public and private projects.
 - Design streets for multi-modal use.
 - Integrate transit stop facilities into public and private projects.
 - Orient buildings and houses to the street.
 - Provide attractively landscaped streets and buffers.
 - Preserve existing and historic urban fabric.
 - Eliminate blank wall facades.
 - Incorporate bicycle routes and enhancements in public and private projects.
4. A fixed urban services boundary to reduce sprawl and infrastructure costs.
5. Focused growth along existing or planned transit corridors rather than extension of transit to serve new isolated development.

6. Prevention of large areas of single uses. Isolated single-use developments at the edge of the City could encourage automobile travel for commuting and errands.
7. Provision of convenience retail and services in ground floor space downtown to accommodate the needs of employees and reduce the need for mid-day automobile trips.
8. Adopt and maintain zoning regulations that allow for a mix of land uses to reduce vehicle trips and the overall need for automobile use.

CM-6c Parking standards for new development. The City's should continue to specify maximum parking requirements for new development and eliminate minimum parking requirements. Parking lots should be located, where feasible, to the rear or side of commercial and multi-family residential buildings.

Together, these policies continue to support near-term and mid-term need for private vehicle infrastructure while building out the new alternative transportation infrastructure that will be needed to shift a larger proportion of our trips to non-motorized vehicles.

Changing the standards to lower the maximum parking required, eliminate or reduce the minimum parking required, and encourage new infrastructure development to support alternative transportation is a net positive for commuters regardless of their preferred mode of travel.

Other Amendments

There have been several suggestions for amendments to the General Plan since the December 12, 2023, draft release. These proposed changes and the actions taken on them are being tracked (Attachment A). The Council may wish to review or provide direction on the proposed changes. The tracking table is current through February 1. It does not include the changes recommended by the Planning Commission on February 13, 2024.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

These policies are better for equity, health, and the environment. Staff can elaborate on these policy benefits, but better infrastructure for supporting lower cost modes of transportation, better bus service, and more connected neighborhoods support the City's equity and environmental goals.

COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REVIEW:

The body of policy has been recommended for approval by the Planning Commission and has been reviewed by the Transportation Safety Committee.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):

The General Plan Draft EIR is currently out for public comment.

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT:

The funds for the General Plan update have been budgeted.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. General Plan Amendments Post Dec 12 (PDF)