

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 18, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: SANDRA MARKS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #4 - PARKING STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT TEXT AMENDMENT

ISSUE: This text amendment proposes to amend Article II, “Definitions”, Section 2-100 and Article VIII, “Off-Street Parking and Loading”, Sections 8-100, 8-200, and 8-400 of the Zoning Ordinance to update the Parking Standards for Multi-family Residential Development consistent with recommendations resulting from a 2013-2015 study of the City’s Multi-family Residential Development Parking Standards.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission hold a public hearing and endorse the approval of this amendment.

DISCUSSION: In 2013, the City Council directed staff to study citywide parking standards in the Zoning Ordinance, to evaluate existing City parking standards in light of current demand, and to propose revised parking standards as appropriate. The study was divided into phases; the first phase is to evaluate multi-family residential parking, because significant multifamily development pressures are occurring in the City and is anticipated to continue for the next few years. The second phase of the project, to begin in the summer of 2016, is to evaluate parking standards for new retail, commercial, and office development.

The goal of this study is to “right-size” the City’s parking standards to reflect current City policy and practice, changing demographics, and market trends. Parking standards in the City’s Zoning Ordinance were last comprehensively updated in the 1960’s. Since that time, opportunities for alternate modes of travel have increased, single-occupancy auto travel has decreased, and per household car ownership is declining. These trends highlight that consumer demand for vehicles is decreasing, lessening the demand for parking facilities. Consistent with this trend, over the last several years, the majority of multi-family residential development projects have requested and received parking reduction Special Use Permit approvals to reduce their parking ratio.

Data Collection and Analysis

One of the key aspects of the first phase of the study was to collect and analyze data on parking utilization at existing multi-family developments in the City. The multi-family residential sites were selected to represent a range of projects, based on their proximity to a Metrorail station, building type, and geographic distribution within the City. Staff conducted on-site parking

counts, as well as on-street parking counts within a 0.25 mile radius, at each selected development from 10pm to midnight. Each residential site was surveyed on two weeknights. Staff also collected data on walking conditions at the site as rated by Walk Score, number of bus routes serving the development, number of units and bedroom sizes, fees for on-site parking, number of parking permits issued to residents, and car ownership data. Additionally, parking utilization data for affordable housing developments was supplemented with data from property owners and managers (Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority and AHC, Inc.).¹

The data was then analyzed to determine which factors impact on-site parking demand and utilization, and to what degree. In addition, staff conducted a literature review on parking demand management standards, including local and national best practices. Based on available primary and secondary data, staff found the greatest impacts on parking demand include proximity to a Metrorail station, walkability of the neighborhood, percentage of studio units in the development, number of bus routes serving the development, and proximity of neighborhood services. Many of these factors contribute to car ownership and the demand for parking.

Public Engagement and Peer Consultation

In January 2014, the City Council established an advisory Task Force (Task Force) to provide input on revisions to the City's parking standards and develop general guidance on recommendations for parking standards for new development projects. The Task Force also has a role to support City staff in communicating the efforts, outcomes, and directives of the citywide parking study by reporting back to the commissions, boards, and groups that they represent. The Task Force has provided valuable input on the draft alternative recommendations and has supported the recommendation that is proposed. Attachment 1 provides a list of Task Force members and meeting topics, as well as other public outreach conducted as part of the project.

During the study, staff consulted with local jurisdictions (Arlington County, Montgomery County, and Washington, DC) and other parking managers and transportation planners. This was done as part of both data collection and in vetting the draft alternative recommendations. Staff wanted the final draft recommendation to reflect the industry's best practices but be responsive to on-the ground realities in parking management. The consultation meetings were helpful in identifying pitfalls and potential implementation challenges.

Staff also shared the draft alternative recommendations with NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, to obtain input from the development community. The members of NAIOP provided their experiences with financing on-site parking and balancing market demands with regulatory parking requirements. They provided general support for both of the draft alternatives and the proposed parking ratios.

Staff presented draft alternative recommendations to the members of the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations in the fall. The members provided feedback on the parking study as well as feedback on citywide parking concerns, such as those related to the Residential Parking Permit program, metered parking in commercial areas, on-street parking management, and WMATA's capital budgets and future service demands. The Federation members' feedback related to the study included a request to change the schedule to allow for a City Council Work Session in addition to the already planned work sessions with Transportation Commission and Planning

¹ Staff conducted one evening site visit to affordable housing development

Commission; and requiring developers to fund community benefits equivalent to the value of the parking spaces that they would have been required to build under the existing regulations.

The study and draft recommendations will be shared with the Environmental Policy Commission and the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee in March and April, respectively.

Alternatives Analysis

In the fall, staff developed and proposed two draft alternatives. The first alternative was a performance-based approach for determining parking ratios based on factors that most strongly influence parking demand. This approach allows a project's final parking ratio to be determined based on factors such as a project's access to transit, neighborhood walkability, and bedroom count. The second alternative was a "range" approach, with a minimum and maximum parking ratio. One range of parking ratios was for projects located close to Metrorail and another range of parking ratios was for projects located further from Metrorail. The developer could select any parking ratio within those ranges.

The performance-based approach, versus the parking range, was the preferred alternative by both the Task Force and staff, because of the following: 1) parking ratios will be determined by a set of known performance-based criteria that reflect the site's characteristics and the factors that impact parking demand, 2) staff will work with developers to ensure that the performance-based credits are appropriately applied, 3) the performance-based credits can be applied on a voluntary basis, therefore, the developer can provide the necessary parking for the residential project's target market, and 4) greater transparency will be in place because the public will be fully aware of the basis for each development's parking ratio. The performance-based approach recommendation includes separate ratios for market-rate housing and for affordable housing. The proposed text amendment language can be found in Attachment 2.

Recommendation: Market-Rate Housing

The parking ratios for multi-family market-rate housing are categorized in two geographic areas - within the 0.50 mile walkshed of a Metrorail station and outside of the 0.50 mile walkshed of a Metrorail station. The base ratios were determined by evaluating the current observed parking demand (during the data collection site visits) and including an additional buffer to account for practical capacity. The base parking ratios and allowable deductions for market rate housing are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 below:

Table 1

Development Project Location	Base Parking Ratio
Project located within .5 mile of Metro Station walkshed	0.8 space/bedroom
Project located outside of .5 mile Metro Station walkshed	1.0 space/bedroom

Table 2

Allowable Deductions on the Base Parking Ratios	
Project located outside 0.5 mile Metro Station walkshed but within 0.5 mile BRT stop walkshed	10%
Walkability Index score is between 90-100	10%
Walkability Index score is between 80-89	5%
Four or more bus routes stop within .25 mile of development entrance	5%
Development project has 20% or more studio units	5%

Recommendation: Affordable Housing

These proposed parking requirements are for income-restricted affordable housing units only. For affordable housing, parking demand for income-restricted affordable housing tends to be driven by unit and not individual bedroom counts. The per-unit ratio is a better measure for car ownership and usage in affordable housing units since they are closely monitored and usually occupied by one household typically sharing resources, including cars, childcare, and other needs. Data collection and analysis supports this. Market-rate units, in this urban area, have far more occurrences of multiple head of households sharing two- or three-bedroom units, leading to higher parking demand, which makes a per bedroom parking ratio more accurate in market rate units.

The recommendation includes a tiered reduction based on the household area median income (AMI) that the housing unit serves. Area median income reflects the income level at which half of all families in the area earn more and half earn less. The 2014 AMI in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area is \$107,000 for a household of four. A four-person household at 60% AMI would have income at or below \$64,200, at 50% the household income would be at or below \$58,850, and at 30% the household income would be at or below \$32,100. The City would confirm compliance with the income levels as part of its ongoing monitoring of affordable units. Like the market-rate projects, the affordable unit's parking ratio can be lowered if the development project in which it is located meets certain criteria. The base ratios and allowable deductions are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below:

Table 3

Household Income Being Served	Base Parking Ratio
Housing Units Affordable at 60% AMI	0.75 space/unit
Housing Units Affordable at 50% AMI	0.65 space/unit
Housing Units Affordable at 30% AMI	0.50 space/unit

Table 4

Allowable Deductions on the Base Parking Ratios	
Project located within 0.5 mile Metro Station walkshed OR the 0.5 mile BRT stop walkshed	10%
Walkability Index score is between 90-100	10%
Walkability Index score is between 80-89	5%
Four or more bus routes stop within .25 mile of development project entrance	5%
Development project has 20% or more studio units	5%

Applying the Draft Recommendation

The new parking ratios for multi-family market-rate and affordable housing will be applied within the following framework:

- Applying the performance-based credits to the base parking ratios is optional; however, it informs the appropriate ratio for the development project. The final parking ratio for each project will reflect the needs of the project and its neighborhood; and, it will be approved by the Planning Commission and City Council with the development approval for the project.
- Development projects are not required to provide parking for the third and fourth bedrooms, but may do so if desired.
- Visitor parking is included in the base parking ratios. It is recommended that developments set aside 5-10% of the parking for visitor parking, which should be

identified in each project's parking management plan.

- A project requesting a parking ratio higher than the base ratio or lower than what is allowed by applying the performance-based credits will require a parking modification Special Use Permit with review and approval by the Planning Commission and City Council.
- To allow for possible physical constraints in the layout of a parking structure, each development is permitted to provide 5% more or 5% less parking than is required under this recommendation without a Special Use Permit.

Implementation

Staff recommends that the draft recommendations be approved as a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance and replace existing parking requirements for multi-family housing citywide. The benefits of updating the Zoning Ordinance include 1) align the City's parking regulations with current City practice, 2) reduce the number of parking reduction Special Use Permit requests for multi-family housing, 3) increase transparency about the City's parking requirements, adding certainty for the community and developers, 4) maximize City staff resources by removing the need to review and manage frequent parking reduction requests, and 5) implement a tool identified in the Housing Master Plan to maximize production of affordable housing.

Approving the new standards as a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance is consistent with the original intent of this study. However, in response to City Council request to investigate options that might allow for increased mitigation contributions, staff investigated alternative implementation approaches. One option is that the draft recommendations be approved as a new City policy that would inform the parking ratios determined through the Special Use Permit process. As a policy, it could act as an interim pilot of the proposed recommendations to be tested until the commercial phase of the Parking Study is completed several years from now. Staff has determined that while this is an acceptable alternative, it is not the preferred path, as it does not accomplish the original intent of the parking study nor provide the benefits of a text amendment. A new policy, even if in line with current City practice, retains an outdated Zoning Ordinance, promotes the requirement for developers to apply for parking reductions, would not promote an efficient use of staff resources, and would continue to contribute to public confusion and lack of clarity about the City's parking requirements. Further, it could result in continued over-supply of parking in some transit-rich locations, running counter to the City's transportation and environmental policies.

The draft recommendations, if approved by the City Council, would retain the City Council's purview over further parking modifications (for developers to provide more or less parking than established in the proposed standards) through the Special Use Permit process. If a project requests and receives a parking modification, the City Council could require that the development mitigate negative impacts to the transportation network and/or adjacent community.

Implementation of the proposed new parking standards will be supported by a "Guidelines Document" that will provide the details of the new parking standards for both market-rate and affordable multi-family residential development projects, instructions on calculating parking ratios, explanation of the applicability and exclusions of the new standards, process for requesting modifications to the new standards, additional guidance on applying and interpreting the watershed maps, and a glossary of relevant terms.