

Public Hearing before  
The D.C. Zoning Commission  
regarding:

**Support for the Office of Planning's Proposed Parking Regulations**  
**Case No. 08-06-2**

By Patrick Lynch  
1700 Harvard St. #405  
Washington, DC 20009

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My name is Patrick Lynch. I am a resident of Washington, DC and hold a Masters degree in City Planning. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the commission today because I know that parking regulations are an important issue, not only to drivers, but also to the 37% of D.C. households who do not own a car. Parking regulations are not just a tool to control the supply of parking. They also have deep influences on the look and feel of neighborhoods, the way people get around, and the cost of goods and services. Decisions by the zoning commission on this issue will have a profound impact on the future of the city.

In 1958, the zoning commission decided that the future would be dominated by the automobile. Assuming that car ownership was "universal" and that mass transit would soon be confined to history, city policymakers began to rebuild the city around the automobile. New highways were built, streetcars were shut down, and minimum parking requirements were imposed.

The problems with this vision became clear soon after, as congestion threatened to choke the city and people no longer accepted the destruction of their neighborhoods in favor of highways. Today, the problems with the 1958 vision are even greater. Gas prices are high and the exhaust from the millions of cars in the D.C. area pollutes the air and contributes to global warming, the consequences of which affect all of us.

Minimum parking requirements, in particular, have received heavy criticism since 1958. Many studies have shown that they raise the cost of housing, reduce walkability, and generate even more traffic. Moreover, they are virtually arbitrary standards with little scientific basis.

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Ironically, for as many negative side effects as minimum parking requirements produce, they are ineffective at solving the “parking problem.” Minimum requirements demand the construction of off-street parking, but since off-street parking in the city is usually in a garage, it is more expensive than curbside parking. That means people will always look for curbside spaces first, even if they are far away. The point is, shoppers and commuters do not park in residential neighborhoods because there is not enough off-street parking, they park in residential neighborhoods because it is cheaper. Building more off-street parking will not solve the problem. The only thing that will solve the problem is better management and pricing of curbside spaces.

Nevertheless, the D.C. zoning code, through minimum parking requirements, continues to encourage the automobile as if nothing has changed in the preceding fifty years. New thinking is desperately needed, which is why I wholeheartedly support the Office of Planning’s proposal to eliminate most minimum requirements, establish maximums, and encourage alternative forms of transportation, such as cycling and car-sharing.

New as the proposal may be, it is hardly experimental. Many neighborhoods in D.C., including Capitol Hill, Georgetown, and Dupont Circle were built before minimum parking requirements existed. These are highly desirable places to live that work as well today as they did when they were built. In addition, the Office of Planning’s proposal fits in with a growing trend. Several cities in the U.S. have removed minimum requirements and/or established maximum limits in their downtown areas and the entire country of the United Kingdom got rid of its minimums years ago. Finally, it is important to put this proposal in perspective: in most of the city, minimums will still apply to non-residential properties and change will only occur gradually over many years.

I hope the zoning commission understands what is at stake. The current parking regulations make it difficult, if not downright illegal, to build walkable and environmentally friendly neighborhoods. They encourage more people to own and drive cars in the city, making congestion and pollution worse and they force new development projects to waste money and space on asphalt and garages, even when parking is unnecessary. Minimum parking requirements have inflicted this harm on our city for over fifty years, even though they are a terrible solution to the problem they were intended to solve. D.C.’s parking policy needs reform. As a resident who wants walkable, affordable, and environmentally friendly neighborhoods that will remain livable no matter how high gas prices rise, I urge the members of the zoning commission to accept the Office of Planning’s proposal. Thank you for listening.