

Zoning Testimony: Subtitle C Parking Reforms

Tuesday, November 12, 2013

Michael J Farrell

73 S Street NW

Washington, DC 20001

I am a resident of Bloomingdale, I have lived in this city since July 2001, and I would like to be able to stay here. That's why I support the Office of Planning's proposals for reducing parking minimums.

I own a car, and drive it maybe once a week, mostly to leave the city. I parked on street for many years, but I recently started parking in my back yard.

1. Residential parking minimums raise costs and hurt affordability, for housing and for everything else.

Land is expensive in DC, and structured parking is extremely expensive – roughly \$40-50,000 per space. Some people may wish to pay for a parking space, but everyone should be given the choice whether to buy a parking space or not. Parking minimums can be especially onerous with older neighborhoods and historic buildings, where retrofitting parking can be more expensive than with new construction.

2. Parking breeds driving.

Whenever parking minimums are high, parking tends to get bundled into the rent or home price, and employers provide parking at free or discounted rates. "Free" or bundled parking is a major incentive to own a car and drive it. Even when good transit alternatives are available, most people will choose to drive if they can park free.

More driving means more noise, more pollution, more congestion, and more pressure to make changes to the streets that will harm pedestrians and bicyclists, hurt our business districts, and harm property values.

3. Parking is ugly, and makes for boring streets.

Surface parking is ugly, and structured parking often means a dull street face for buildings. Retrofitting parking into a historic structure can do violence to the original design, and may not be achievable without demolition. DC is blessed to have relatively little surface parking.

Caveats:

- A major gap in the OP's proposal is on street permit parking. On-street parking is nearly free for residents, even in very expensive and congested neighborhoods. This encourages people to use the streets as long-term storage facility for little-used vehicles. I know, I did that for many years.

Higher residential parking rates, which should reflect the cost of off-street parking in the neighborhood, would encourage people like me to do the right thing, and either park on their own property, rent a space, or get rid of my car and make use of car sharing or rentals when I need to drive. Absent a sufficient increase in the rates for on-street parking, people will waste time and money circling around, looking for parking.

- Handicapped placard abuse. I have reason to believe that not everyone in my neighborhood who has a handicapped placard is actually handicapped, not when they're coming home from the club at 3 in the morning. The most reliable way to fix handicapped placard fraud would be to charge the same parking rates for the handicapped as for everyone else. While services must be accessible to the handicapped, they do not have to be provided to them for free.
- Parking benefit districts are needed. Raising residential rates is hard sell if the money just goes to the general fund. Funds from increased parking revenues should be earmarked to benefit the community in which they are raised, whether through increased services, or by reducing property tax, or some combination of both.

Thank you.