Reduced parking requirements overview

Most cities establish in their zoning code a minimum number of off-street parking spaces that must be created for each home in a residential development. The number of spaces required can be based on the number of bedrooms (e.g., 0.5 spaces per bedroom) or established on a per unit basis, and may vary by location or project.

Parking requirements aim to ensure that new residents have a dedicated place for their vehicles without creating negative spillover effects on public parking in the surrounding area. However, parking requirements increase the cost of developing housing by increasing the land area required, unless the development incurs the added expense of structured parking. Particularly in the development of multifamily housing in urban areas, structured or underground parking can cost anywhere from $25,000 to $65,000 per space, a significant cost factor for each unit of housing. In many cases, minimum parking requirements also go beyond what is strictly needed to ensure that residents have adequate parking and may encourage higher rates of car ownership and driving, which increase congestion and pollution. In addition, there are circumstances where a one-size-fits-all parking requirement results in excess land dedicated to parking that might otherwise be used for housing.

Cities, towns and counties seeking to expand the supply of housing may wish to revisit their zoning code to determine whether current minimum parking requirements can be reduced in some or all parts of town or for certain development types. By reducing off-street parking, communities can lower development costs, potentially free up land for additional units, and reduce the cost of housing for residents. Alternatively, some cities establish parking maximums, rather than minimums, to discourage the creation of excess parking spaces.