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D.C. Officials Propose Lowering Parking Spot Requirements For Developments



Martin Di Caro

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Under a new proposal, parking minimums will still be required for new developments, though the number of spots will be less than what's currently on the books.

Victoria Pickering: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/vpickering/3795010023/>

The first major re-write of D.C.'s Zoning Code since it was established in 1958 is drawing closer to completion. One week from today the Office of Planning is expected to hand over its final proposals to the Zoning Commission after six years of work.

D.C. Planning Director Harriet Tregoning stunned the smart growth community when she made this announcement on *The Kojo Nnamdi Show* two weeks ago: "There will still be minimum parking even in areas that are served by transit. It will be a lot less than our current minimums."

Tregoning had long been adamant that the city's rules mandating a minimum number of parking spaces when developers build near rail or bus stations was wasteful, but changed her tune after a number of public hearings on the Zoning Code re-write.

Mandatory parking minimums in transit corridors will now be reduced, not eliminated, under a series of proposed zoning changes her office will submit to the Zoning Commission next Monday. Tregoning still wants to get rid of all the minimums in downtown Washington.

“What she is trying to do is to avoid building very expensive parking that then just sits there and increases the cost of doing business and makes housing less affordable,” says Chris Leinberger, a real estate developer and urban planning expert at George Washington University.

He says Tregoning’s proposal to only reduce the minimums in transit corridors should not be viewed as a major setback by her supporters. In his view, D.C. is going in the right direction by trying to make parking more difficult.

“What we’ve learned as far as building great cities—i.e. cities that are walkable, that have lots of transit options, and that no matter how you measure them they are the finest cities on the planet—is they all have parking problems,” he says.

That sentiment may sound anathema to drivers who say it’s already too hard to find parking in D.C. But Leinberger—who authored a study calling the Washington metro area a national model for creating walkable urban places—says few people pause to consider just how much parking is subsidized by everyone to the benefit of motorists.

“What is important here is that we the citizens including myself have to understand, to quote a book, that there is a very high price of free parking on our society,” he says.

AAA has led the opposition against Tregoning’s efforts but Leinberger is not impressed.

“Their theory for making great urban places has miserably failed. We should not follow their lead. They do not know what they are talking about. They do know how to make suburbs,” he says.

Leinberger says it’s time to stop subsidizing the cost of parking for the sake of the city’s future.



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