



Parking Study Session #1 – Off-Street Private Parking

Workshop Summary

City Council, Planning Commission, and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee came together for a joint workshop on March 28, 2022 to discuss private off-street parking standards and offer feedback to guide future code amendments. City Staff opened the meeting introducing the folks in the room, providing an overview of background on the effort including what inspired the need for the workshop, conversations to date, and resources available for the public. City Staff covered objectives for the evening session and introduced the broader framework for approaching parking reform.

Background

What got us here? Efforts leading up to the workshop.

Community Conversations. City staff has repeatedly heard from decision-makers and members of the public that proposed development is too auto-oriented. While City Staff have identified this community priority, they also identified the gaps in the current code to address these development patterns.

Focused Interdepartmental Meetings. Leading up to the evening the Planning Department met with City Leadership representing the City Manager’s office, Public Works, Housing, Economic Development, several times to identify synergies within other city efforts and provide updates as the process moved forward. These interdepartmental meetings helped to ensure collaboration and efficiency throughout the process.

Industry Expert. The City partnered with transportation consultants Nelson/Nygaard on the effort to ensure that Petaluma was working with the latest innovations in parking reform. Nelson/Nygaard brought an industry leading lens to the conversation and offered technical advice, policy options, and related case studies to help guide future code amendments.

Website and Community Educational Materials. City Staff created a website for this effort to keep the community up to date and share educational resources to strengthen understanding on how parking policies shape our city and individual behavior. The webpage includes a Read, Watch, Listen section with links to resources that allow people to access information in whatever format is best for them. [Click here](#) to visit the website.

Study Session Series Framework

The session is the first of three sessions to discuss parking standards in Petaluma. This first session focused on off-street private parking regulations, Session 2 will focus on public parking, and Session 3 will focus on the relationship between active transportation, public transportation, and parking.

Why start with off-street parking first?

City Staff has heard repeatedly from decision makers and members of the public that proposed development is too auto-oriented. Petaluma needs parking policies that align with our community values and goals so that new developments reflect and advance these values and goals. Additionally,



identifying the impacts of off-street private parking best enables the story of how parking shapes our city, movement, economy, and social lives to clearly be told.

Acknowledging Related Efforts

Through the various interdepartmental meetings it was clear that these parking conversations connect to many other city-wide efforts including the following:

- General Plan Update
- 6th Cycle Housing Element
- Complete Streets
- Bike Share
- Traffic Calming Improvements
- Second SMART Station
- Active Transportation Plan
- Micro-mobility options
- Transit Service Update and Expansion
- ADA Improvements Citywide
- Vision Zero
- Real-time bus signage
- Wayfinding
- Shuttles
- Local Roadways Safety Plan

The City acknowledges the connections the parking study session conversations have to these efforts and plans to closely collaborate with the relevant departments to ensure efficiency.

Objectives for Study Session #1

- Kick-off the parking conversation as Part 1 in a series of discussions
- Illustrate connections off-street parking has to various city-wide efforts, goals, and core values Petaluma's hold
- Receive feedback on range of policy options to guide off-street parking ordinance updates

Rethinking Parking Policy in Petaluma Presentation

City Staff introduced industry experts and consultants Nelson\Nygaard Lauren Mattern and Thomas Brown who went on to provide an informative presentation that answered the following questions:

- What are parking requirements?
- What do they look like in Petaluma?
- How does parking impact citywide goals?
- Which policy tools are available to bring better alignment between parking policies and citywide goals?

A high-level summary of the presentation is below. If interested, [click here](#) to view the full presentation.

What are parking requirements?

Parking requirements are a form of land use regulation that determine the amount, location, and size of parking that developers must include when building new developments. The most common form of parking standards are minimum parking requirements (or parking minimums)— and they apply to just about every type of property. Their purpose is to oversupply parking so that there are always empty parking spaces available. Parking minimums seek to oversupply parking, even assuming that cars are the



only way people travel from Point A to Point B. This is a feedback loop that shapes our communities around parking which in turn makes us more dependent on driving, which then necessitates more parking. In Petaluma today, any new property development must include off-street parking, based on a range of parking standards.

What do parking requirements look like in Petaluma?

Two regulating documents prescribe current parking standards in Petaluma – the Implementing Zoning Ordinance (IZO) and the SmartCode. The IZO implements the Petaluma General Plan which is currently being updated and the SmartCode implements the Central Petaluma Specific Plan which applies to land generally north of both Petaluma Boulevard North and South, and south of Lakeville Street - along both sides of the Petaluma River down to the U.S. 101. Each of these documents currently prescribe a parking minimum requirement without a parking maximum requirement. They are also based on outdated metrics, the IZO can largely be traced back to 1974, and policies that are no longer best practice such as prescribing minimum standards based on number of seats at a restaurant or number of lanes at a bowling alley.

To view a summary of the parking standards in the IZO [click here](#), for the full text of parking regulations in the IZO [click here](#). To view a summary of the parking standards in the SmartCode [click here](#), for the full text of parking regulations in the SmartCode [click here](#).

How does parking impact citywide goals?

Current parking standards primarily affect citywide goals in four ways:

Vehicle Miles Traveled, Alternative Transportation, and Carbon Emissions

When there is available parking, especially free available parking, it is an added incentive to drive which increases vehicle miles traveled and carbon emissions while decreasing the incentive to use alternative transportation even when people would be willing to use it.

Housing and Affordability

Parking is expensive to build, which drives up the cost of construction and therefore the cost of housing to either rent or purchase. Without parking minimums more homes could be built at a more affordable price.

Community Character and Health

Parking lots are not appealing places and outside of the function of car parking they do not add value to communities. Parking also pushes destinations further apart which makes walking or taking transit less safe and less pleasant. Additionally, parking loses social benefits for our city. When people are in their cars they are not out on the street having conversations with people and connecting. When walking or taking public transit there is greater opportunity to run into a neighbor or make a new friend. Additionally, driving from A to B does not provide any physical health benefits as active transportation such as walking or biking would.



Economic Health

Preferences have been shifting even before the pandemic. People are using ride hail apps more frequently, they are shopping online, working from home, and prioritizing experiences over things. Business owners have seen these trends and want to convert their parking lot space into more exciting uses such as outdoor dining or an event space, however, minimum parking requirements prevent them from doing this. In other American cities tax benefits of less parking can clearly be seen; market value and tax revenue per square foot is higher.

What parking policy tools are available to better align parking standards with citywide goals?

Eliminating Minimum Requirements. Eliminating parking minimums means getting rid of them altogether (citywide), or targeting certain zones, uses, or scales.

Reducing Minimum Requirements. Reducing the amount of off-street parking required for new development.

Establishing Parking Maximums. Parking maximums are a cap on the number of parking spaces that can be provided in a new development.

Fixed Maximums: Ratios define a hard cap on accessory parking supply, based on land uses proposed

Flexible Maximums: Ratio-based caps can be exceeded if specified conditions are met such as hared, below grade, or pervious parking or mobility improvements or TDM commitments.

Unbundle Parking. Unbundling parking separates the cost of parking from other costs (e.g., rent or purchase cost). If consumers no longer perceive parking to be free, they may, instead, opt out of renting a parking space and choose other transportation modes (i.e., walking, biking, transit).

Bike Parking Requirements and Design Standards. Decouple bike parking requirements from vehicular parking requirements and establish bike parking requirements that are tied to specific land uses. Use design standards to ensure parking is accessible, functional, and attractive.

Update Parking Ordinance Purpose Statement. Revise the Parking Ordinance to reflect current policy goals. Noticeably absent from the purpose statement are references to Petaluma's current policy goals (e.g., both General Plan and Climate Emergency Declaration) and acknowledgement of current technologies and lifestyles.

Change of Use = No Parking Required. Allow all existing commercial buildings to be occupied by a permitted use without the need to provide additional off-street parking

Consistent Metric for Parking Calculation. Provide a static, measurable standard (e.g., gross floor area, per dwelling unit) for all land use classifications as they relate to parking standards.

Consistent Access and Stall Standards. Consolidate parking design standards —which are currently different in IZO, SmartCode and Site Plan & Architectural Review guidelines —into a single, consolidated set.



Exempt Small Business from Parking Requirements. Adopt a standard that promotes the retention of existing small businesses and invites investment from new ones —by exempting small businesses, or a threshold of square feet (e.g., first 1,500 sq ft) from any parking requirements.

Discussion

Following the presentation the three bodies engaged in a dynamic discussion, asking clarifying questions, and offering their thoughts on the direction of where they think updates to parking regulations should go. The discussion featured a range of ideas and comfort levels on the policies presented. A high-level summary of the discussion is below:

Big Picture:

- Not planning for today but planning for the future
- Goal is to shift away from cars, we must reduce the options to drive
- If we are approving uses – we need parking to meet their needs
- We need paradigm shifts – it is our job to nudge people in the right direction. This is about change at every level
- This is a timely discussion where we need to balance old patterns and a new reality
- Need to plan for active transportation and shared mobility
- Street safety needs to be a priority

Ideas for Consideration:

- Need to create and allow flexible use of community spaces. Parklets and other uses such as dining
- Shuttle from underutilized parking areas to other areas
- Need better wayfinding. Use technology to identify empty parking spaces
- Would like to flip the script and have developers justify the amount of proposed parking on site
- Would like to see options that utilize shared parking for off-peak hours e.g., bank that closes at 5 can share with another use that opens in the evening
- Free parking at schools is incentivizing and normalizing driving at a young age, consider parking fees at high schools
- Currently there is a fair amount of privately owned parking that is underutilized. Developers could rent surrounding underutilized parking instead of providing new parking
- Could parking spaces be smaller?
- Is there opportunity to provide flexibility on parking requirements on a project by project basis?
- Surface parking is very outdated, need to move away from this
- Would be great to charge developers for TDM to help fund transit

Important to Note:

- In defense of aggressive measures – the only argument against most of these measures are that residents are humans and have fears of change
- Important to separate housing affordability with Affordable Housing
- Planning Commission is committed to reducing VMT and getting people out of their cars



- Parking affects the adjoining neighborhood. Example Casa Grande Road – there was a push to reduce parking on site but neighbors came in and asked for more parking and that ultimately is what happened.

For Next Time:

- Would like to see case studies from communities that are similar to Petaluma
- Is there a case study of a community who got rid of too much parking?
- Amy's Kitchen coming into downtown could decimate public parking. Need to think about more parking in the downtown core
- PC and PBAC work on rewriting the parking ordinance purpose statement

Attendee Live-Polling and Public Comment

After a lively discussion from the three bodies it was the public's turn to provide input. City Staff introduced Mentimeter a live polling tool which was utilized to gauge how community members in attendance were feeling about the proposed policy options. The following is a high-level summary of the polling results, highlighting the top 3 policies that received the most votes. To view the full results, [click here](#).

Of the policy options presented which 3 are you most excited about?

- Eliminating Minimums – 24%
- Unbundling Parking – 23%
- Updating Bike Parking Requirements – 14%

Of the policy options presented are there any that feel like not a good fit?

- None – 53%
- Eliminating Minimums – 9%
- Establishing a Consistent Metric for Parking Calculations – 9%

Of the policy options presented which 3 do you feel would set the best path for Petaluma to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030?

- Eliminating Minimums – 27%
- Updating Bike Parking Requirements – 20%
- Unbundling Parking- 16%

What are things that are on your mind and we should make sure we are thinking about for the following sessions? (open response)

- Climate change and how to meet our goals
- Get examples of similar sized towns
- Street safety and generating revenue through parking
- Literally anything but cars
- Pain must be born by the newcomers moving into the city. Protect the adjoining neighborhoods with parking permits. Free to current residents up to a max allowed, but charge others.



- Public transit, buses, trains. Making sure development considers access to transit
- Downtown walkability
- Bike safety. How scary it is to bike on our roads
- Eliminate all subsidies to carbon use
- So many economic studies have been done about how much parking costs cities, and how building for pedestrian and bike environments is more economically productive. We need more emphasis on that.
- Actually think about alternatives to cars
- Council members as representatives, not imposing their will on citizens
- Free parking is bogus
- More safety for biking and walking
- Improving public transit, making SAFE bike routes
- Convert car parking to bike parking, have to add options (better transit, etc) at the same time as we remove parking
- Stronger transit
- Dynamic market-rate street parking/willingness to nudge residents
- Dealing with downtown businesses whose employees park in neighborhoods and not using garages (Keller St)
- Best practices and examples of communities similar in size to Petaluma. Excited about these updates!
- Complete streets
- It would be good to see how Petaluma's actual numbers on tax revenue per sq. ft. shake out. The presentation offered other cities or specific sites. Also I noticed that new construction (or better is avoidance) wasn't in the presentation
- Relating transit importance to eliminating parking
- Pedestrianization of non-thru fare streets

Once live-polling concluded public comment was opened. A total of 11 attendees provided public comment. Their comments are summarized below:

- Would like to focus on alternative solutions to driving rather than negative incentivization to driving. Focus on solutions that would make alternatives to driving superior to driving
- This is part of a larger discussion, viewing the entire system as a whole, and asking how do we get people out of cars
- City does not have safe walking or biking paths except for Lynch Creek Trail. Need to keep in mind the aging community
- Converting car parking into other uses such as outdoor dining or bike parking, we have seen this work great during the pandemic.
- Tourism in Petaluma is most likely to increase throughout the next few decades, need to be thinking about this and the amount of additional cars it will bring to the community
- There is a social benefit to getting people out of their cars. People get to know each other better, they look out for each other more, they understand each other more. A deeper sense of community is a large benefit to transitioning active and public modes of transportation



- Other communities of similar size host events such as Friday Nights on Main Street – closing down the streets and making pedestrian only. This is something we should strive to be the norm in the future, must plan for it now.
- Free parking at the high schools is an issue, starting at the youngest age to incentivize driving in the community. Idea is to charge for parking at the high school so that the younger generations have this way of life engrained within them from an early age
- Pricing and variable pricing would be helpful for on-street parking
- Underscoring the chicken and egg issue on getting people to mode shift. Policy direction is a tool to gradually move us more towards our carbon neutrality goal
- Would like to see smaller retail options in walkable neighborhoods rather than these large box retailers that you need to drive to
- Examples from communities of similar size in California would be helpful
- How do we undo the mistakes of the last 50 years? What do you do to plan for existing parking to be converted to housing?
- Infrastructure solutions other than bikes. Petaluma needs to work on seamless public transportation
- Desire for covered bike parking spaces that can park bikes with trailers
- Parking ordinance needs to understand surrounding neighborhoods, who is living there, what the current availability of parking is
- Car parking has a definite economic and environmental cost, we should not be supplying parking that is not needed
- Shift of people working from home and at times working out of an RV parked on the street. This takes cars off the road and decreases vehicle miles traveled
- Strong Towns would be a good resource to tap into

Straw Poll Questions for Council

Following public comment an additional opportunity for comment and questions from the three bodies was offered. Concluding this comment and question section the Mayor led a straw poll exercise with council members where they were asked whether they would support the various policy options presented. The results are as follows:



	Barnacle	Healy	Fisher	Barrett	Pocckay	McDonnell	King
Exempt small businesses from parking requirements	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Establishing a change of use = no parking required	Yes	Yes, with caveat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Update the Parking Ordinance Purpose Statement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Unbundling parking for multi-family housing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decouple bike parking requirements from vehicular parking requirements	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Establishing a consistent metric for parking calculations	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe
Eliminate minimum parking requirements	Yes	No	Yes	Yes, with caveat	Yes	Yes	Yes
Explore establishing flexible maximums	Maybe	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Maybe
Explore Transportation Demand Management Strategies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Explore incentives for sharing parking facilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flexibility for project specific parking	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Meeting Close

City Staff closed the meeting reminding those in attendance that this is the first discussion that is part of a larger series and that a city-webpage dedicated to the effort is available and will be updated as the process unfolds.

Key Meeting Takeaway

The session proved that there are various policy options available to transform Petaluma's parking code to meet community goals. The conversation confirms that there is political will and curiosity to address the disconnect between current parking standards and community goals and values.