

Parking spaces should reflect demand

by **Richard Lyall** on 22 Apr 2021

Times are changing and so has the demand for parking spaces in the GTA.

A decrease in vehicle ownership and increases in driving alternatives like ride-sharing and public transit has resulted in reduced need for parking spaces by residents who buy units in new developments.

Thankfully, the city is now reviewing its parking regulations. Planning staff have proposed less restrictive parking space requirements for developers, and they're looking at ending parking minimums in favour of parking maximums on new developments. This would lower construction costs—and result in savings for home purchasers. A win-win, as they say.

The matter is a bit complicated but under current rules the city requires a minimum number of parking spaces to be provided by a developer based on the location and use of new buildings.

However, a report prepared by the planning staff has recommended the city instead implement a maximum number of required parking spots. Removing minimum parking requirements will allow market trends to determine parking necessity. The change would reduce the risk of future oversupply of parking.

Recommendations on long-overdue changes to the zoning bylaw, which governs parking requirements, will be presented to Toronto's planning and housing committee by the end of 2021.

In downtown Toronto, builders are supposed to provide 0.3 parking spots for a bachelor condo, 0.5 parking spots for each one-bedroom condo, 0.8 spaces for a two-bedroom, and one parking stall for condos with three or more bedrooms. A single parking space costs between \$80,000 and \$100,000 in downtown Toronto, so it certainly adds to the cost of construction. These additional costs negatively impact housing affordability and represent an unnecessary burden for certain demographic groups that are not interested in vehicle ownership.

Going deep underground for parking also adds to the construction time to complete high-rise buildings. We are therefore advocating for innovative above-ground parking options to be considered. The focus must change to recognize the environmental consequences of building more underground parking.

Simply put, the further down a builder must dig to provide parking, the higher the cost of the digging deeper and the process can have a negative impact on stormwater capacity and result in challenges for sewer infrastructure.

We believe the city should consider above-grade parking because it is less expensive and, at the same time, allows for the repurposing of parking spaces if they become redundant in future.

Building above-ground parking also greatly increases the speed of construction and minimizes the disruptive impact. On average, two months of construction could be saved per parking level, according to anecdotal evidence. This means that up to 12 months could be shaved off a construction schedule.

This is critical because we are presently short 12,000 housing units a year. A 2020 report by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis indicated the GTA could see up to 100,700 additional housing units by 2040, with the City of Toronto seeing 21,100 additional units by 2025, if there was a reduction in delays to the approvals process by six months and a 10% increase in investment.

In rethinking its methods, perhaps the city should look west to Edmonton which adopted an approach called open option parking that removes minimum on-site parking requirements and allows developers, homeowners and businesses to decide how much on-site parking to provide on their properties.

That, in our books, seems to be a good idea.

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