

February 17, 2025

Dear Mayor Johnston and Denver City Council Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, businesses, and community leaders, are writing to express our strong support for the proposal put forth by Community Planning and Development to **modernize Denver's parking requirements by removing minimum parking mandates from the zoning code**. We further urge you to consider additional common-sense reforms to Denver's parking policies that prioritize spaces for people over cars.

Parking mandates in Denver's current zoning code reinforce our city's unaffordable, unhealthy, and unsustainable dependence on cars, and work against citywide goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, increasing housing affordability, building more walkable neighborhoods, creating economic opportunity for all Denver residents, and developing safe mobility options that prioritize walking, rolling, biking and transit and connect people of all ages and abilities to their daily needs.

Denver's costly and excessive parking mandates harm our city in a number of ways:

- **Parking mandates prioritize car storage over housing and create an oversupply of parking.** Reports estimate there are [8 parking spaces for every 1 car](#) in the US. In Colorado, [studies](#) of affordable housing and transit-area housing projects found that 40-50% of parking spaces sit empty during peak periods, which adds up to hundreds of millions of dollars in wasted spending and land that should be used for housing and local businesses.
- **Parking mandates drive up the cost of housing.** Parking is incredibly expensive, priced anywhere from [\\$9,000 and \\$50,000](#) per spot, depending on the structure. To recover those costs, builders incorporate them into the price of goods, services, and housing – increasing average rents by [\\$200 to \\$300 per month](#), regardless of whether all parking spaces required by code are used or not. By eliminating mandates, we can boost [homebuilding by 40 to 70%](#).
- **Parking mandates penalize those who cannot afford to own a car.** Rental and low-income households often pay for parking that they don't need or want. For example, a 2020 study in Denver of 0-60% AMI unit apartments found that only [1 in 8 units owned a car](#). While Denver [lowered the required parking spaces for homes affordable at 60% AMI or below](#) to 0.1 spaces per unit as a result of this study, Denver needs more sweeping reforms to benefit more people.
- **Parking mandates hinder economic development.** Many commercial projects and small businesses never get off the ground as they struggle to fit both the building and the mandated parking on the available lot. When Longmont removed parking mandates for commercial building use, it [facilitated the development](#) of new restaurants and commercial establishments on smaller lots along Main Street.

- **Parking mandates reinforce car dependence, leading to more climate pollution and sprawl.** Excessive parking is directly linked to [more car ownership](#) and [vehicle miles traveled](#), increasing pollution from transportation, [the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions](#). Parking mandates assume that everyone is driving and ensure that our communities are designed for cars instead of more affordable, healthy, and clean transportation options.
- **Parking mandates undermine public transit** by competing with housing for land and pushing buildings further apart, which hinders walkability and transit access. [Research shows](#) that transit station areas need a minimum density of 15 homes per acre to support frequent transit, yet only 7.5% of rail stations and 15% of frequent bus routes in the Denver region meet this threshold. Fortunately, Denver has ample opportunities for transit-oriented development (TOD). RTD owns 30,000+ parking spaces, approximately 8,000 of which are located within the City and County of Denver, with just 20% utilization in 2023. These lots could fit tens of thousands of homes near transit, reducing driving and boosting transit use, but excessive parking mandates often stand in the way of new development.

For these reasons and more, leading professional planning organizations, including the American Planning Association (APA), the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and the National Parking Association, endorse the removal of parking minimums. To be clear, removing minimum parking mandates won't stop developers from building parking. Rather, it will allow builders and local businesses to determine how much parking to provide for each specific project, giving them the flexibility to right-size their parking to meet demand.

In addition to removing minimum parking ratios from the Denver zoning code, we urge you to consider these additional common-sense parking management strategies, some of which are described in [Best Practices in Parking Management Strategies for Colorado Communities](#):

- **Set parking maximums** in high-density, mixed-use, transit-rich areas such as downtown Denver. The Denver Moves Downtown plan specifically identifies parking maximums as a policy that would help the City achieve its mobility goals for downtown.
- **Establish parking benefits districts** in downtown and along bus rapid transit corridors and around rail stations to better manage demand for limited on-street parking and reinvest parking revenues into programs that support walking, biking, transit, and related improvements within the district.
- **Require parking to be unbundled from housing** so that parking spaces for each unit in a development can be rented, leased, or sold separately from the unit itself. [One study](#) found that unbundling parking from housing costs reduces parking demand by 10-20%. This strategy is already a popular voluntary option under the City's Transportation Demand Management Policy, and we recommend strengthening that policy by making it a requirement. (See model code language for Unbundled and Priced Residential Parking on page 81 of the [Best Practices in Parking Management Strategies for Colorado Communities](#).)

- **Mandate EcoPasses** for all tenants of new developments subject to Denver's Transportation Demand Management regulations.
- **Facilitate shared parking agreements** between new and existing developments, especially when nearby parking is underutilized (e.g., empty office parking garages). This approach creates a mutually beneficial opportunity to meet parking demand without overbuilding additional supply.

Car dependence is a policy choice reinforced by decades of excessive parking mandates. Now, Denver has an opportunity to make a different policy choice that better aligns with our environmental, economic, and equity goals. If we fail to adopt and implement these data-driven policies, we will continue to double down on the status quo of car dependence, perpetuating a system that wastes money and land, exacerbates the housing affordability crisis, harms the health of our communities, hurts local businesses, and produces planet-warming emissions. **We therefore urge the City and County of Denver to swiftly enact the proposed zoning code changes to eliminate parking minimums citywide, and support the other parking management strategies outlined above.**

Sincerely,

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Matt Frommer, Transportation & Land Use Policy Manager, Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEET)

Shaida Libhart, Legislative Affairs Representative, APA Colorado

Chris Applegate, Chair, Colorado Sierra Club

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