

Parking Reimagined

REVIEW OF FAIRFAX COUNTY PARKING AND LOADING REGULATIONS

PROJECT SUMMARY

Background

Fairfax County is starting a review of its off-street vehicle parking and loading requirements located in Article 6 of the new Zoning Ordinance ([Ordinance](#)). As part of the zMOD project, which resulted in adoption of the new Ordinance effective July 1, 2021, the parking and loading requirements were updated where needed, but the standards from the previous Article 11 were kept in Article 6 with few changes. While updates to the county's off-street parking and loading requirements have occurred over the years to address specific needs, a full review has not occurred since the late 1980s. Thus, a review of parking rates was identified as a separate amendment topic in the 2020 Zoning Ordinance Work Program.

In the spring of 2021, the county chose Clarion-Nelson\Nygaard, a partnership of two national land use and transportation consulting firms, to help with this important project. Clarion Associates has completed over 180 zoning and development code revision projects throughout the U.S. and Canada, including Fairfax County. Nelson\Nygaard is recognized for their expertise in analyzing parking supply and demand characteristics and trends to develop innovative approaches to assist municipalities in managing parking resources. They also recently assisted with updating the county parking requirements for regional shopping centers such as Fair Oaks Mall. For more information about each firm, please visit: www.clarionassociates.com and <https://nelsonnygaard.com>.

It is recognized that driving a car will continue to be a common activity and that parking will still be necessary. It is also known that there are some parking supply concerns in the county that we must address. However, providing parking must be considered with other community values. These include equity, affordability, the environment, land-use site design, and economics, all reflected in the goals of [One Fairfax](#) and our [Strategic Plan Initiatives](#). Some value judgments to be considered with the Reimagining Parking project are outlined below. Decisions about these values must be balanced with a need for car parking.

- **Equity.** In older, underserved suburban communities, surface parking areas are often the front face of commercial and multi-family residential properties. Minimum parking requirements can limit the ability to improve buildings and provide additional reinvestment opportunities that would benefit the community.
- **Affordability.** The building of parking creates a cost that is passed on to others to pay for and maintain that area. For example, the cost of parking can influence the ability to build affordable housing.
- **Environment.** Car parking creates hardscapes, which contribute to heat island effects, water runoff issues, and lost opportunity costs for green alternatives. Improving our abilities to address these impacts is needed.
- **Land-use Site Design.** Land redevelopment initiatives have a built-in ability to positively address many community values. Car parking should not outweigh those values.
- **Economics.** Land and structures have monetary value. The value of available parking should be considered against other uses of that land area that may have broader public good.

Project Goals

In some ways, little has changed with parking since the 1980s. People still routinely drive and park their cars at their home or place of work. However, in this thirty-year span, several forces have influenced that basic activity. Changes in technology, such as the use of autonomous and electric vehicles, remote working, and car sharing have affected parking needs. An example that most residents can relate to is the growth of online retailing. The delivery of many products to our homes reduces the need to drive and park at a retail store, which lowers parking demand at retailers.

Alone, the changes that have occurred require a re-examination of parking requirements. However, we must also look at current and future trends in parking supply and demand as the county continues to evolve with the changing world. Our regulations must have more flexibility to be adaptable to a greater variety of circumstances. During the past thirty years, the county has changed from primarily a suburban community of single-family homes with shopping centers and office parks to become an employment center, a generator of retail sales that are among the highest in the country, and residential communities of varying development intensities that are home to a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse population. Our parking regulations need to relate to activities within that broad range of land use opportunities.

Further, it is important that our processes for evaluating parking are clear and consistent. This involves looking at our internal operations and policies as well as the regulations for parking. We will examine where flexibility and streamlining can be gained with changes to our processes. We will also consider if parking rates for various uses should be changed. Further, we will review parking requirements in various land-use areas and intensities to determine if additional fine-tuning should occur, recognizing that a “one size fits all approach” for parking countywide may not be the best approach.

In sum, the project has four basic goals.

- Creating opportunities to balance on-site parking supply and demand to meet the day-to-day needs for the land use without under-building or over-building parking areas, also known as ‘right-sizing’ parking.
- Identifying methods to provide more flexibility in the parking regulations to address site and area specific circumstances.
- Streamlining county review and approval of parking proposals.
- Reviewing and updating vehicle loading requirements.

Our consultant will assist us in studying and developing recommendations for off-street parking activities in the county. They will look at best practices among selected local and national governments, complete comparative analyses, and help with engaging the community.

Public Information and Engagement

A critical element of the Parking Reimagined project is engagement with the community to seek important and useful information about their experiences, thoughts, and values on parking. The public will be engaged in many ways to provide information about the role of parking in the community and understand how the current parking requirements directly impact our residents. The engagement process will be ongoing and interactive with the community as we gain more knowledge of the parking needs of the county and propose changes to the requirements. The engagement process will kick off in October 2021 and continue throughout the lifespan of the project with anticipated public hearings on proposed changes in late 2022 into early 2023.

Parking Reimagined will engage a diverse work group that includes members of the community that will be a part of the project through its duration. Each Board of Supervisors member is anticipated to identify possible members for this work group. Staff will work closely with the group to discuss the project and talk about ideas and proposals. The membership of this group will be from the Fairfax County community and have diverse backgrounds and experiences. Because parking affects everyone, this means that residents, business owners, non-profit community organization members, religious leaders, and land developers could be part of this group.

The engagement plan will seek a wide variety of voices from the community. As we provide the background on the project and how it fits into the community, who can provide diverse and constructive feedback. Among the groups that we plan to meet with are community associations and residents, industry groups, local business associations, non-profit organizations or various affiliations, and religious organizations. We will also use many options to engage with the public to seek their experiences and thoughts, such as community and town hall meetings, county government Channel 16 forums, video presentations, and surveys. Our outreach will also consider the effects of Covid-19 by allowing remote electronic participation in the discussions and other feedback tools using mobile phones and social media.

For more information about community engagement opportunities please visit the dedicated at [Parking Reimagined](#)

Project Tasks Summary

The county and our consultant will work together on these tasks to support the Parking Reimagined project.

- Community engagement and input at all steps of the project.
- Comparing off-street parking characteristics of other places that are like us, including local places.
- Evaluation of parking best practices in other places for possible use in Fairfax County.
- Information gathering, review and analysis of the required parking and loading for all types of property uses and zoning designations.
- Review of county parking regulation practices and policies.
- Create parking practice and regulation options for discussion.
- Development of recommendations for Ordinance changes and county best practices for parking and loading regulation and administration.

Adoption of Revisions to the Vehicle Parking and Loading Standards

After public input on the draft recommendations is complete, staff will prepare proposed changes to the Ordinance, which will be advertised for public hearing before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

Expected Project Schedule

TASKS	2021		2022			
	Aug - Sep	Oct - Dec	Jan - Mar	Apr - Jun	July - Sep	Oct - Dec
1. Public Information and Engagement						
2. Comparative Review						
3. Review and Analysis of Land Uses and Parking						
4. Best Practices Review						
5. Recommendations						
6. Adoption of the Revised Zoning Ordinance						

Questions?

If you have questions or comments about this project, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Davis, Parking Program Manager with Land Development Services, or Austin Gastrell, Planner with the Department of Planning and Development at DPDLSParkingAmendment@fairfaxcounty.gov or visit the project website at [Parking Reimagined](#). If you would like to receive email updates about this project, please visit the project website and click "Add Me to the

Zoning Ordinance Information and Amendment List Serve.” You may follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcounty zoning/>.

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