UCONN

Zoning for Municipal Resilience

Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation
Zoning Fact Sheet Series

Reducing Parking Minimums

Parking and Climate Resilience in Cities

- Required Parking Minimums were first adopted by cities to curb the demand for on-street parking; however, mandating onsite parking can be a poor use of limited land in crowded urban areas and increases impervious surface area leading to storm water management issues and increased urban heat.
- Mandating Parking Minimums encourages auto centric development regardless of the walkability culture within a neighborhood.
- Allowing development with no mandated minimum parking does not mean no parking will be constructed. Instead, lower levels of included parking will allow some projects to be financially viable that otherwise would not be.

What are Parking Minimums?

Parking Minimums are municipal zoning ordinances that mandate a certain number of off-street parking spaces commercial and residential property owners must provide and maintain. These requirements are usually determined by the square footage of a pertaining structure or number of residential units. Parking minimums assume all people own a car, can afford to drive it, prefer to take it over other forms of transport and must park close to home and businesses.

Reducing or abolishing parking minimums can reduce the amount of impervious surface coverage associated with a property, leading to better stormwater management and contributing less to urban heat impacts. Balancing the need for onsite parking with more efficient land use can also lower construction costs and lead to denser development. In urban areas with access to public transit, reducing or removing parking minimums shifts transportation from cars to more energy efficient options. Considering a municipality's needs and goals is imperative when evaluating parking minimum reduction and/or abolishment, as is the availability of public transportation and safe active transport options.

For example, for larger and mid-sized towns with access to rail and bus networks, sidewalks, and bike lanes and pathways, reducing or abolishing parking minimums allows for economic development in parity with existing conditions. Instead of imposing extra costs to create unneeded parking to meet mandated minimums, projects become financially viable leading to increased options and density without increasing auto generated greenhouse gas costs. Thus, eliminating parking minimums can have an indirect positive effect on increasing climate resilience in a community.

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CONNECTICUT Department of Housing

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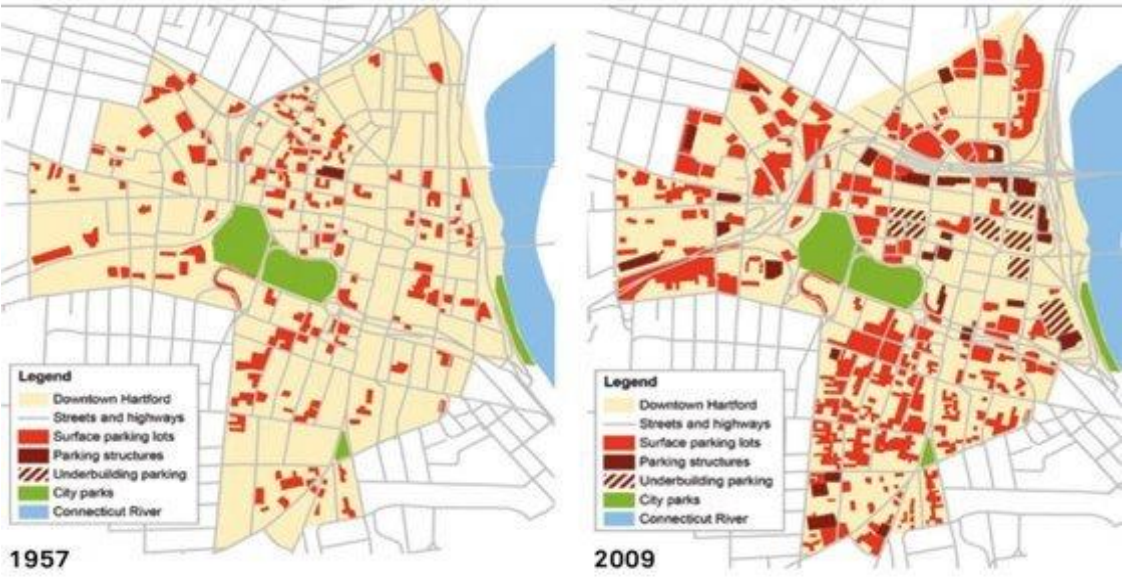
Parking Minimums and Climate Resilience

Parking minimums indirectly limit the climate resiliency of communities in several ways. When large areas are required for parking, impervious pavement is increased, leading to higher urban heat, and increasing stormwater runoff. Dark pavements without mitigating vegetation absorb heat leading to heat island effects. Stormwater runoff from large surface lots can overwhelm drainage systems leading to flooding in heavy precipitation events.
Fewer units of housing can be developed on the same sized parcel if land must be set aside for surface parking. The costs for including structured parking in multiunit housing complexes often can make the development costs prohibitively expensive, making only the most expensive housing projects financially viable. In areas with affordable housing shortages, this means it is difficult to create new housing options that increase the percentage of affordable units, an issue that has plagued Connecticut for decades.

Reducing parking has several benefits. First, land use is more efficient leading to denser housing which should provide more affordable options and less impact on the natural environment. Denser development increases walkability, meaning fewer vehicles are driven, leading to better air quality, reducing the negative health impacts of car pollution. Walking or biking becomes safer with fewer cars and people gain the health benefits of using active transport options. Having less surface lot parking reduces impervious cover mitigating urban heat effects and decreasing flood events when coupled with better stormwater management. Fewer cars overall also make it easier for those that need a car or other mobility aid to access and navigate urban environments.
In places with excess area devoted to surface level parking, land may be available for conversion to public amenities like small parks and greenspace. These areas could double as spaces that can flood in large precipitation events mitigating flood damage. The recently redeveloped Meridan Green in Meridan CT is an example of this kind of project.



Researchers determined land dedicated to surface parking lots in downtown Hartford, CT, tripled between 1960 and 2000.

Credit: Christopher McCahiil and Norman Garrick

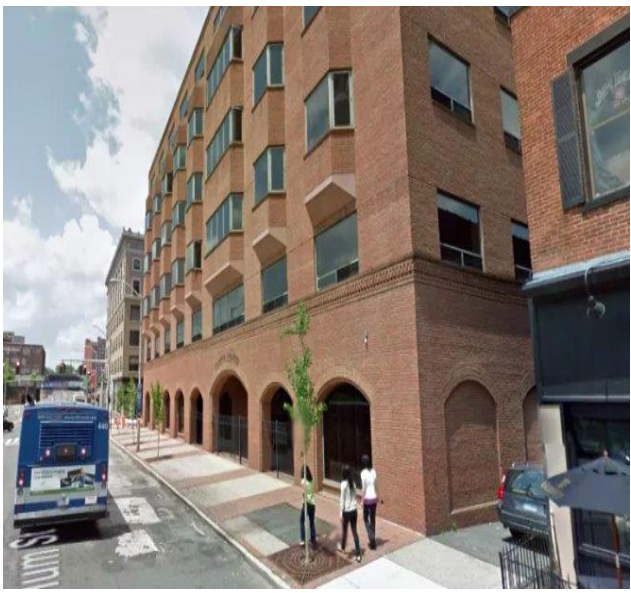
Connecticut Parking Reform

In 2021 with Public Act 21-29, the Connecticut General Assembly capped parking minimums for new development at one space for studio and one-bedroom units, and two spaces for those with two or more bedrooms, but allowed for an opt out option.
In 2025, the legislature proposed HB 7061 which would prohibit any parking minimums for any development, but the measure did not pass. Subsequently, in a November 2025 special session, the legislature created a mechanism allowing municipalities to continue to have off street parking minimums but allowing for greater flexibility for development with reduced parking and limiting the areas where parking minimums can be enacted. These provisions become effective on July 1, 2026 and are codified in C. G. S. § 8-3n.
Municipal land use commissions can further reduce parking requirements or abolish them completely, depending on the town's needs. Again, this regulation should be context specific. What may be appropriate for one town or zone, may not be appropriate for others. Data evaluation is required to make sound decisions.

Abolishing Parking Minimums Example

Hartford, Connecticut

Hartford, Connecticut abolished parking minimums city-wide in 2016. This has allowed a spate of housing development and adaptive reuse of existing buildings that would not otherwise have been financially viable if parking minimums were in place.
Harford is also experimenting with changing the time allowed for on street metered parking in some locations to encourage more rapid turnover for business access. Shorter time periods make parking for quick trips easier and cars spend less time driving around looking for parking which reduces emissions.
Left is a picture of a building that was converted to apartments in downtown Hartford after Parking mandates were lifted.



370 Asylum street, an adaptive reuse of a former office building in downtown Hartford. ©Google Maps 2026

Because of these eliminated mandates, developers are now able to renovate buildings in a quicker and more efficient manner without providing more than necessary parking. Land can be utilized for better value with less constraint on the city's tax base.

However, the Hartford, CT zoning code does contain some parking mandates—for bicycles. New buildings, new uses of existing buildings, or 15% or greater increases in number of housing units or floor space trigger mandatory bicycle parking.

Next Steps

Municipalities should continue to evaluate their parking requirements for residential and non-residential areas. Minimum Parking requirements for multifamily housing and mixed-use developments within a half mile to public transit stations should be eliminated and active and public transit options encouraged. Pairing decreased parking minimums with post-auto centric transportation planning may reduce the need for impervious surfaced parking areas, better managing stormwater runoff and mitigating urban heat island effects. Fewer cars reduces pollution and improves air quality leading to better health outcomes.

Parking minimums influence:

- Base rental costs for housing and businesses passing costs to consumers and renters.
- Perpetuate auto centric communities and increase GHG emissions.
- The structure and function of urban spaces, making it harder to shift to other forms of transportation.
- The use of land and capital, creating sprawl over walkable neighborhoods.

Additional resources

Bronin, Sara. 2018. *Rethinking parking minimums*. Planning, 84(2).

Grabar, H. 2023. Paved Paradise: How Parking Explains the World. Penguin Books.

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Hartford, CT, Zoning Regulations. https://library.municode.com/ct/hartford/codes/zoning_regulations.

McCahill, C. T. and N. W. Garrick. 2010. *Influence of parking policy on build environment and travel behavior in two New England cities, 1960 to 2007. Transportation Research Record.2187 (1).*

Parking. Desegregate CT. https://www.desegregatect.org/parking

End parking mandates and subsidies. Strong Towns. https://www.strongtowns.org/parking#:~:text=Parking%20minimums%20are%20local%20laws,are%20built%20and%20laid%20out.

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To learn more about CIRCA, visit circa.uconn.edu and the Resilient Connecticut project for more climate resilience planning tools: resilientconnecticut.uconn.edu

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