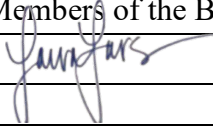




CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Laura Larsen, Budget Director 
DATE	September 5 th , 2025
SUBJECT	25-0065 Zoning – Eliminating Off-Street Parking Requirements

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400

Position: Defers to Parking Authority

The Department of Finance is herein reporting on City Council Bill 25-0065 Zoning – Eliminating Off-Street Parking Requirements, FOR the purpose of repealing requirements for providing a minimum number of off-street parking spaces per use type; setting certain parking maximums; and correcting, clarifying, and conforming related provisions and tables.

Background

Baltimore’s Zoning Code includes a set of rules—known as Title 16 of the Zoning Code—that govern how off-street parking, loading zones, and bicycle parking are planned and built across the city. The exact ratios to determine how many off-street parking spaces must be provided are listed in: Table 16-406 Required Off-Street Parking. The title is referred to in other places as “parking minimums,” “minimum parking requirements” or “parking requirements,” and the goal is to create parking and loading areas that are safe, well-designed, and appropriate for the specific needs of a property. Parking and loading requirements apply to most new developments and major renovations. If a developer is adding space to a building, changing the use of a property, or rebuilding after damage, the developer may be required to add or maintain parking and loading spaces. Certain types of properties—like historic buildings or affordable housing—may qualify for exemptions or reductions.

Parking Minimums

Parking minimums are ratios established by municipal zoning codes that mandate the construction of a certain number of parking spaces per a specified number of dwelling units or square feet of building area. These requirements set a minimum threshold for the number of off-street parking spaces that must be provided. Currently, the parking minimums are laid out in: Table 16-406 Required Off-Street Parking. This table breaks down how many off-street parking spaces must be provided depending upon the use of the property. These parking minimums are required regardless of market conditions, neighborhood desire, or costs, and can only be waived under certain circumstances. As with many items in the Zoning Code, under certain circumstances as laid out in Title 16 and elsewhere in the zoning code, a property owner can receive permission to deviate from existing parking minimum requirements by being granted a variance. Variances are granted by the Director of Planning, the Zoning Administrator, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals (BMZA), or the City Council, depending on the type of variance, as outlined in the Zoning Code.

Impact of Council Bill 25-0065

Council Bill 25-0065 proposes to eliminate minimum parking requirements and introducing parking maximums in the City's zoning code. The elimination of minimum parking requirements comes with the elimination of existing rules that required developers to provide a certain number of off-street parking spaces based on the use of a property. The legislation also removes prior exemptions, reductions, and special provisions related to required parking.

In place of parking minimums, Council Bill 25-0065 sets upper limits on the amount of off-street parking that can be provided. For example, residential developments would be capped at two spaces per unit, and large retail stores would be limited to four spaces per 1,000 square feet. Council Bill 25-0065 also removes several portions of the code that were used to reduce the minimum number of parking requirements—such as formulas for affordable housing, shared parking arrangements, and land-banked spaces. The legislation makes clear that accessible parking for people with disabilities will continue to be required under state and federal law.

Effects of Parking Minimums

Parking minimums have wide-ranging impacts that create both benefits and burdens across different segments of the population. As mentioned previously, the impact of parking minimums is that a developer must build the required number of parking spaces required regardless of market conditions, neighborhood desire, or costs, or ask for a variance if the project meets the standards for one. This means a portion of the physical space of the property and money raised for the development are dedicated to producing parking instead of dedicated to the residential, or commercial space.

On one hand, these requirements benefit motorists, particularly those who place a high value on convenience and are willing to pay extra for on-site parking. By ensuring parking spaces are readily available at residences and businesses, parking mandates can reduce the risk of spillover parking, offering relief to nearby drivers who rely on street parking and helping city officials avoid neighborhood conflicts.

However, the costs of these mandates often fall unevenly. Households that own fewer vehicles than required by the mandates effectively subsidize those with more vehicles. These households pay for parking spaces they don't need or use, inflating housing costs. This system particularly disadvantages lower-income households, where residential parking costs take up a larger part of their income. Not every household has a car, in Baltimore 27% of all households do not have a car.

The consequences extend beyond individual households. Parking mandates encourage car ownership and increase vehicle traffic, contributing to congestion, crash risks, heat islands, impervious surfaces, and pollution—burdens that are felt most acutely by surrounding communities. By making land development more automobile-centric, these policies promote urban sprawl. The resulting spread-out development patterns lead to higher infrastructure costs borne by the City and, ultimately, taxpayers. This also raises transportation costs, particularly for those who do not drive.

Environmental impacts are also significant. More paved surfaces lead to greater stormwater runoff, heat island effects, habitat loss, and air and water pollution. Additionally, curb cuts needed for driveways reduce the availability of public on-street parking and degrade sidewalk safety and accessibility, especially for pedestrians with disabilities.

Overall, while minimum parking requirements offer convenience for some—particularly higher-income drivers—they impose hidden costs on others and on the broader community. These impacts highlight the need to carefully consider who benefits from parking mandates and who bears their costs.

This is supported growing body of academic research that points toward parking minimums being a constraint on development generally, but especially in denser neighborhoods because the code forces an oversupply of parking. It also requires that significant portions of a newly developed or rehabbed building must be dedicated to parking and not residential or retail use. The cost of providing and maintaining these

parking spots is passed off by developers to the new owner (the building or dwelling unit) or tenant (residential and retail). This leads to higher housing prices and rents¹ as well as retail² sales prices³.

Maryland Housing Needs Assessment

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (MD DHCD) commissioned a study in 2020 called the “Maryland Housing Needs Assessment”. The report’s intent is to assess Maryland’s current and future housing needs and outline strategies to address them over the next decade in 2020 and through the remainder of the decade in 2025. Its goals include identifying housing challenges, projecting future demand, and recommending policies to ensure all Maryland residents have access to safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. It also aims to guide state and local decision-makers in prioritizing investments, aligning resources, and coordinating efforts to meet diverse housing needs. The report discussed 70 actions designed to address priority needs by region in the state. The actions could be acted upon by state and local governments and policy makers.

Council Bill 25-0065 aligns with three of the recommended actions in the report: reduce or eliminate parking requirements, remove barriers in rezoning processes, and enact zoning changes to allow or expand for higher density residential development.

Reforming Parking Minimums in other cities

In the past five years many American cities are currently reconsidering the parking sections of their respective zoning codes. These reforms generally address four key considerations:

- The geographic scope of the changes
- Whether to change or repeal parking minimums
- Whether certain types of land uses should be excluded
- Whether the changes apply by right or are based on other factors, such as project size

According to a dataset compiled by the Parking Reform Network, 16 cities or counties have adopted changes to their parking minimums that are substantively similar to those proposed in City Council Bill 25-0065.

City	State	Population	Year Adopted
Ann Arbor	MI	120,735	2022
Bend	OR	100,421	2023
Birmingham	AL	210,928	2024
Bridgeport	CT	148,654	2021
Durham	NC	278,993	2023
Eugene	OR	172,622	2023
Hartford	CT	122,105	2017
Hillsboro	OR	106,447	2024

¹ Gabbe, C.J., Pierce, G., 2017. Hidden costs and deadweight losses: bundled parking and residential rents in the metropolitan United States. *Hous. Policy Debate* 27 (2), 219–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2016.1205647>.

² Manville, M., 2013. Parking requirements and housing development. *J. Am. Plan. Assoc.* 79 (1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2013.785346>.

³ Jia, W., Wachs, M., 1999. Parking requirements and housing affordability: case study of San Francisco. *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board* 1685 (1), 156–160. <https://doi.org/10.3141/1685-20>.

Minneapolis	MN	429,606	2021
Portland	OR	654,741	2023
Raleigh	NC	467,665	2022
Sacramento	CA	513,624	2024
Salem	OR	174,365	2023
San Francisco	CA	881,549	2018
St. Paul	MN	304,547	2021

Fiscal Impact

The Department of Finance expects the primary fiscal impact of 25-0065 to be on revenues, specifically property taxes, as this change seeks to encourage additional development. To analyze potential revenue impacts we pulled the number of parking variances granted in calendar year 2021 (2021 was selected to ensure projects have been completed and fully reassessed). When examining this data, we found there were 14 applications, and 13 variances were granted. Of the approved variances 12 were for existing uses, meaning the variance wasn't tied to new development. The limited data set was not sufficient to shed additional insight other than that the project had been granted a variance.

Conclusion

Council Bill 25-0065 represents a significant change to Baltimore's zoning framework by eliminating minimum parking requirements and replacing them with parking maximums. The goal of the bill is that it should remove barriers to development, reduces unnecessary costs, and supports more efficient land use, making it easier to build housing and create walkable, transit-oriented communities. By aligning with statewide housing strategies and national best practices, this legislation addresses long-standing inequities in housing affordability and environmental sustainability, positioning Baltimore to better meet its housing needs while fostering a more connected, resilient, and livable city.

For the reasons stated above, the Department of Finance defers to parking authority City Council Bill 25-0065.

cc: Michael Mocksten
Nina Themelis