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The Parking Problem:

How Reducing Off-Street Requirements and Improving On-Street Management Could Rein in Massachusetts' Housing Costs and Accelerate Economic Development

by Andrew Mikula

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"How to keep these stationary objects [parked cars] off the streets will, for many years to come, be the No. 1 problem of America's cities."
~The Boston Globe, January 22, 1958[1]

Executive Summary

Many off-street parking requirements imposed by local zoning codes are excessive and outdated. They raise housing costs and reduce the scale and pace of new development. They also often mandate much more parking than tenants or patrons need.

Municipalities that have reduced or eliminated parking requirements—including small towns—have seen a considerable amount of new housing production that previously would have been either illegal or prohibitively expensive to build. Pairing off-street parking reform with substantial demand management—including of on-street and public parking—may better align parking supply and demand than off-street reforms alone.

Thus, localities should re-examine the need for off-street parking requirements for both commercial and residential uses. Metered and on-street resident parking should be priced closer to market rate, and landlords incentivized to charge tenants rent and parking costs separately, both of which would help allocate parking more fairly and efficiently in dense areas. By the same token, adjacent businesses should be encouraged to share parking, especially when their peak hours don't overlap.

Parking-related government revenues should be used largely for local streetscape enhancements and other community development activities. In the long term, transit service improvements and land use reforms that facilitate mixed-use neighborhoods would further manage parking demand.

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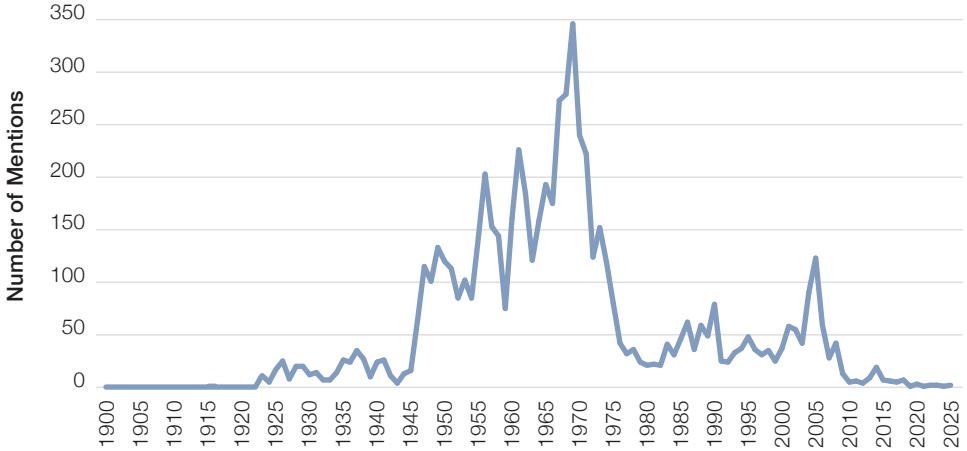
Introduction: The Origin of Parking Requirements

Boston Globe reporter Sid Goldberg wrote the above epigraph as part of a series of at least four articles titled "Parking, The Big City Headache."[2] It was a time of widespread suburbanization and demographic shifts in America, with many large, older cities just beginning a long period of economic and population decline.[3] Urban planners, business leaders, and the public largely seemed to agree that, to adapt to new cultural expectations for convenience and mobility, cities and suburbs alike had to better accommodate personal automobiles, including when their owners were not actively driving them (see Figure 1).[4]

Figure 1: Annual Instances of the Phrase "Parking Problem" in the Boston Globe, 1900–2025[5]



A month after Goldberg's piece was published, Bertram Druker, then president of the Massachusetts Real Estate Association, argued that "off-street parking is the only blood transfusion that can put new life into [struggling communities'] business arteries and prevent them from becoming economic ghost towns."[6] At around the same time, the City of Boston seized and demolished several downtown properties to make way for public parking,[7] and the state used eminent domain to build a parking garage under Boston Common.[8]

But most government agencies simply couldn't keep up with demand for car travel by building public parking facilities. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of licensed drivers in Massachusetts increased by some 1.2 million, more than one in three of the state's adults at the start of the period.[9]

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Thus, over the course of the first generation after World War II, increasingly more municipalities began requiring private real estate developments to include off-street parking for their occupants and/or patrons. Surveys of sizable cities around the country illustrate the point: in 1946, 12.1 percent of responding municipalities had some sort of "zoning for parking"; by 1969, it was 95.8 percent.[10]

In more recent years, the idea that 1950s-era off-street parking requirements are necessary to accommodate resident and consumer needs and support businesses has been more openly challenged. These shifting attitudes coincided with both a resurgent interest in urban living among younger Americans and the rising prominence of environmentally conscious "smart growth" principles within the field of urban planning.[11] Recent academic publications have concluded that parking mandates have negative impacts on the environment, especially by increasing stormwater runoff, flood risks, and urban heat island effects.[12] Simultaneously, worsening housing affordability in much of the U.S. has brought greater attention to the role of off-street parking requirements in reducing the quantity and increasing the price of new homes, largely by creating cost and design constraints.[13]

Parking Requirements in Massachusetts Today

As of this writing, out of 351 municipalities in Massachusetts, only Cambridge and Somerville have explicitly eliminated all off-street parking requirements for new developments.[14] By contrast, many local zoning codes have incredibly detailed tables that list specific minimum parking thresholds for a wide variety of project types, from theaters to apartment buildings to warehouses to barber shops. Carver, Massachusetts even seems committed to providing parking for the deceased: cemeteries require "1 [parking stall] per 8 *occupants* + 1 per 2 employees" (emphasis added).[15]

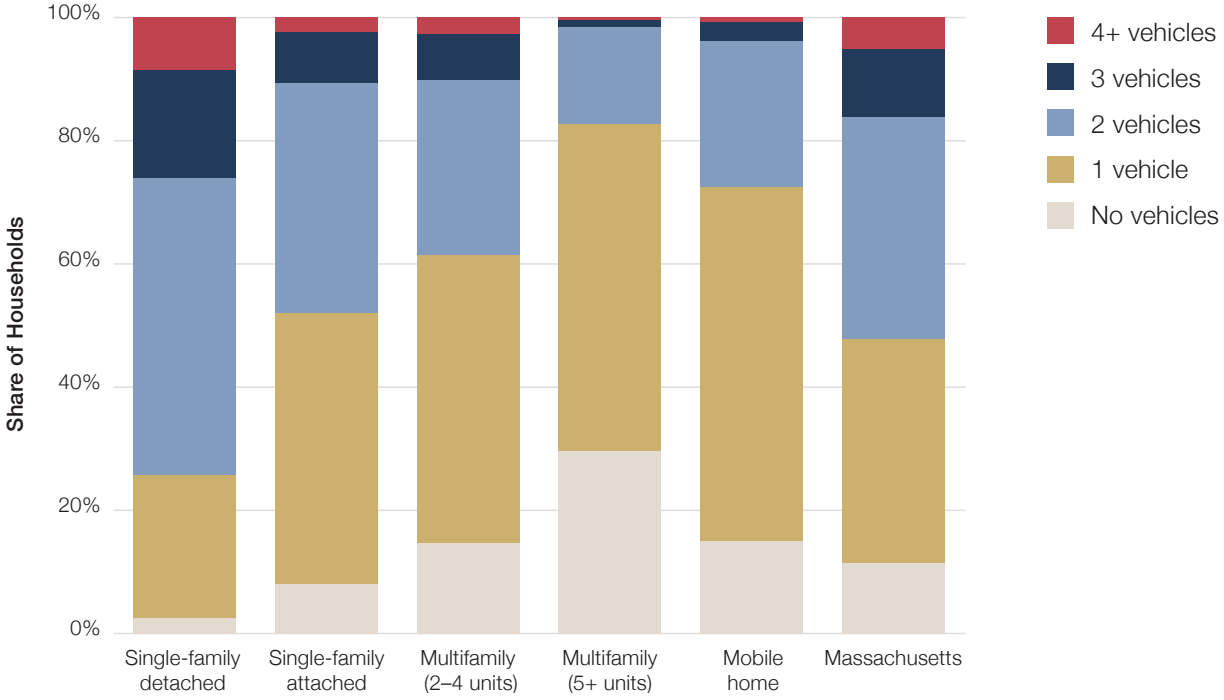
In many contexts, parking requirements are imposed at the discretion of local officials. Discretionary review bodies frequently either deny proposed housing developments over concerns that the project has insufficient parking[16] or approve waivers for strict parking requirements that appear in the zoning code.[17] Some zoning codes, especially in smaller towns, simply require enough parking so vehicles don't have to park on the street, without providing numerical thresholds.[18] Without concrete numbers, the zoning enforcement officer (usually a building inspector) typically has the authority to determine whether the parking provided on site conforms to the zoning.

But most of the time, minimum parking requirements are much more specific, often in ways that make it difficult to directly compare parking requirements for specific uses across municipalities. For example, a bowling alley in Sudbury requires one parking space per 180 square feet of floor area in the building,[19] whereas a bowling alley in neighboring Concord requires one parking space for every four people in the building's

maximum occupancy limit under the fire code.[20] Parking requirements are almost always tied to the property's use, although in some cases they can also vary by zoning district.

For residential uses, zoning codes often require two parking spaces per dwelling unit, with some requirements varying based on the number of bedrooms, square footage, or even affordability. Many zoning codes also have lower parking requirements for multifamily and age-restricted housing developments than they do for single-family homes. This is a prudent reflection of the fact that occupants of large multifamily buildings in Massachusetts are very likely to own just one car or none at all (see Figure 2).

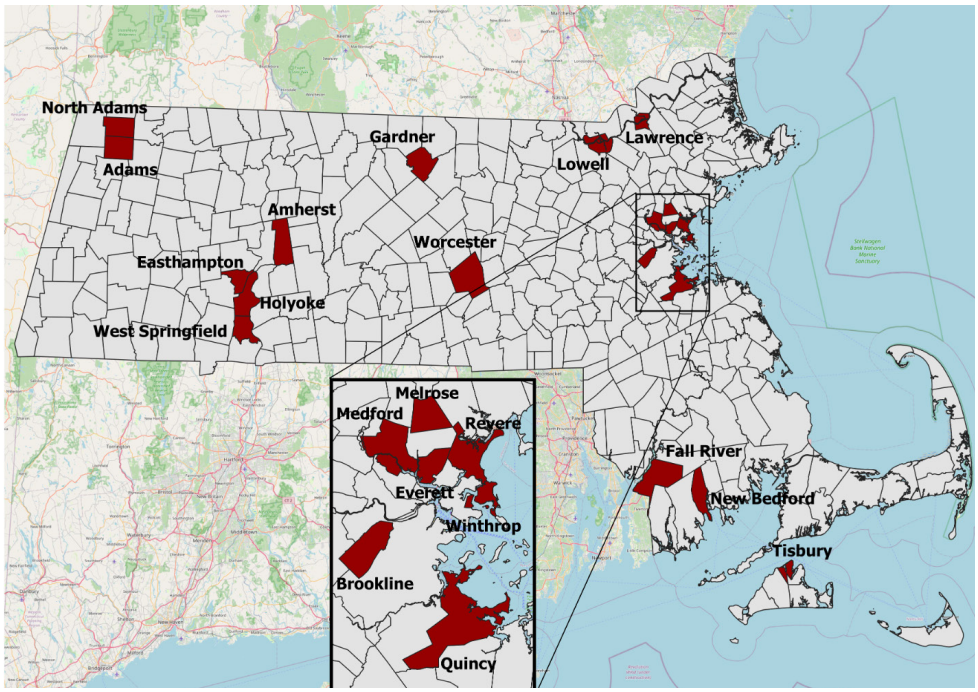
Figure 2: Number of Private Vehicles Owned/Rented by Massachusetts Households by Type of Dwelling, 2024[21]



Still, others have parking requirements for multifamily developments that are broadly out of step with existing patterns of car ownership. According to 2020–2024 5-year American Community Survey data, at least 20 communities in Massachusetts, with a combined population of over one million, typically require two or more parking spaces per unit in new multifamily development, despite most households in the community owning fewer than two cars (see Figure 3). This statistic is especially striking considering that residents of multifamily homes are even less likely to own multiple cars than the general population.

At least 20 communities in Massachusetts, with a combined population of over one million, typically require two or more parking spaces per unit in new multifamily development, despite most households in the community owning fewer than two cars.

Figure 3: Massachusetts Municipalities that Typically Require Two or More Parking Spaces Per Unit in New Multifamily Housing* Where Most Existing Households Don't Have Access to Two or More Cars, 2020–2024[22]



*In cases where there's no one "typical" or default parking requirement, Figure 1 features the minimum requirement for 1,000-square-foot, 2-bedroom, market-rate units in residential zoning districts.

Since 2015, the Boston-based Metropolitan Area Planning Council has catalogued the impact of parking requirements on land use patterns. Among their initial sample of 189 multifamily properties in the immediate Boston area, just 70 percent of parking spaces were occupied in the middle of the night.[23] A supplemental sample later expanded the analysis to suburbs further away from the urban core, where the corresponding figure was 62 percent.[24] In the initial sample, even developments subject to a parking requirement of fewer than three spaces for every four units had a parking "utilization rate" of just 74 percent.[25] In the entire five-phase study, the highest number of occupied spaces per unit at a property was 1.8, and only two out of 340 properties had more cars parked in their parking lots than their designed capacity.[26]

Among the MAPC's initial sample of 189 multifamily properties in the immediate Boston area, just 70 percent of parking spaces were occupied in the middle of the night.

The MAPC study's findings are limited by the fact that it focused exclusively on sizable multifamily properties, many of which are near transit. Still, the results make clear that there is often a mismatch between parking supply and demand in residential developments in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the results are reflected not only in empty spaces, but also in higher costs for tenants, patrons, and property owners.

At Home with Parking: High Costs and Tantalizing Alternatives

For anyone interested in housing production, economic development, or affordability issues, the immediate concern with minimum parking requirements is that they make new development projects more expensive.

The process starts with exorbitant construction costs. According to Cumming Group, in Q4 2025, building an above-ground parking garage in Boston typically cost between $34,000 and $59,000 per space. For an underground parking garage, the corresponding range was $106,000 to $152,000 per space.[27]

These costs, combined with minimum parking requirements, can represent stunningly high percentages of total expenses associated with new residential development. A hypothetical large rental development in Boston with two underground parking spaces per unit could have more than a third of its total construction costs attributable to parking (see Table 1).[28] Empirically, developers pass on the costs of these parking structures to tenants and patrons. One 2016 study out of UCLA found that the average cost of garage parking to renter households is the equivalent of raising their rent by 17 percent.[29]

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Table 1: Estimates of Rental Residential Construction Cost Increase in Boston Associated with Requiring Two Parking Spaces Per Unit in Various Typologies and Arrangements, 2025*[30]

Market Segment	Parking location	Tenure	Building cost per square foot	Parking cost per square foot	Cost increase relative to one parking space/ unit	Cost increase relative to no parking
Low end	Above ground	Owner	$540	$103	5.0%	10.5%
High end	Above ground	Owner	$820	$179	5.7%	12.0%
Low end	Above ground	Renter	$400	$103	7.8%	17.0%
High end	Above ground	Renter	$590	$179	9.1%	20.0%
Low end	Underground	Owner	$540	$265	14.1%	32.7%
High end	Underground	Owner	$820	$380	13.4%	30.9%
Low end	Underground	Renter	$400	$265	20.9%	53.0%
High end	Underground	Renter	$590	$380	20.5%	51.5%

** Assumes above-ground parking is 330 square feet per stall (including circulation), underground parking is 400 sf/stall (including circulation), rental apartments are 1,000 sf/unit (including common space), and owner-occupied apartments are 1,200 sf/unit (including common space). Cost assumptions apply most readily to large buildings on lots without substantial dimensional constraints.*

Parking requirements also reduce the number of new homes that are built, for two reasons. First, cost constraints make some developments unviable when they are subject to parking minimums. Conversely, modeled analyses have shown that parking reform vastly increases redevelopment potential, especially in transit-oriented neighborhoods. One 2024 study of Colorado estimated that eliminating parking requirements entirely would increase the number of "market feasible" housing development sites by 41 percent in census-designated urban areas.[31]

Other studies have clearly identified parking mandates as the leading factor in how much parking is built in some contexts, suggesting they can be a binding constraint on development. A 2020 study of Seattle found that minimum parking requirements empirically explain how much parking is provided in multifamily developments, more so than factors like neighborhood density, the mix of land uses on site, and nearby job availability.[32]

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Second, design and other regulatory constraints combine with parking minimums to reduce the amount of housing built on a given property. This is because most zoning codes limit the ratio of the built floor area to developable land, as well as building height and the percentage of a lot that is covered by buildings. If some of that floor area needs to be parking, it can't be housing or any other use. A 2014 study found that parking requirements reduced the capacity for new housing on a typical Los Angeles development site by 13 percent.[33]

By contrast, when a city reduces or eliminates parking requirements, the results can be stunning. After Seattle did so in 2012, the following five years saw more than 35,000 new homes in the development pipeline using the lower parking requirements.[34] By 2023, those new homes accounted for 9.4 percent of the city's total housing stock.[35] Researchers have also estimated that, just in the first five years, Seattle's lower parking requirements "collectively saved $537 million in [construction] expenses that would have been passed on to future tenants."[36]

At the same time, data suggests that Seattle developers still provided enough parking to meet resident needs. In King County, Washington, which includes Seattle, a 2012 study found that, on average, multifamily buildings supplied 0.4 more spaces per unit than tenants needed.[37] Thus, after Seattle's 2012 parking reforms reduced the average amount of parking in new buildings by 0.3 spaces per unit,[38] this likely reflected a better alignment of parking supply with demand rather than an undersupply of parking.

Parking reforms could also unlock new housing opportunities in Massachusetts. Using the same assumptions that inform Table 1, building one parking stall per unit instead of two in a middle-market rental building in Boston could cut total construction costs by up to 17 percent.[39] In a typical large multifamily development with above-ground parking in the immediate Boston area, those construction cost savings could in turn justify the provision of an additional income-restricted unit at 80 percent of the area median income for every ten market-rate units in the project.[40]

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In many places in the region, one parking stall per unit is already more than enough to satisfy market demand, especially in buildings geared towards young professionals. Besides the MAPC's documentation of underutilized parking lots across the region, perhaps the best indicator of this is the amount of parking built in developments that can obtain waivers from local zoning. As of this writing, a Chapter 40B development is under construction on Crafts Street in Newton, about a 10-minute walk from the MBTA Commuter Rail, that has 0.94 parking spaces per unit.[41] The baseline parking requirement for multifamily housing in Newton, as in much of the state, is two spaces per unit.[42]

Parking reform can also be valuable in more rural and exurban communities. Thompson, Connecticut, a town of 9,000 at the corner of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, eliminated all its minimum parking requirements in September 2020.[43] The original impetus was to make it easier to revitalize a dilapidated downtown mill district. At some point, the conversation evolved to cover townwide reform.[44]

According to Tyra Penn-Gesek, the town's planning and development director, "the argument that won the day was 'why would we tell a professional developer who's coming with a proposal that [town officials] know parking demand better than they do?'"[45] Penn-Gesek added that, before the parking overhaul and other related land use reforms, "it was so difficult to develop anything that, consequently, almost nothing got developed."

As of this writing, the town has more than 400 new homes in the pipeline, most of which are attributable to the planned redevelopment of two former mills.[46] After Thompson's population declined in the 2010s, the mill redevelopments would expand the town's housing stock by 9.8 percent relative to 2020 census figures.[47] Both mill sites will also create neighborhood-scale commercial space.

Asked about negative consequences of the reform, Penn-Gesek emphasizes that parking availability issues "are irrelevant here. The density is so low. There's only one street where [the town] has 'no parking' signs. If there is local interest in maintaining parking minimums, it isn't based on any observable lack of available space."[48]

In 2025, Connecticut preempted local parking minimum reforms statewide in developments with up to 16 units.[49] But Thompson's results pre-date the state's efforts, part of a national track record of local parking reform in small towns. One 2024 analysis found that, nationwide, it is roughly twice as common for a municipality with fewer than 25,000 residents to eliminate parking minimums than it is for a municipality with more than 250,000 residents to do the same.[50]

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On-Street Parking: Better Management, Better Markets

In an era in which car travel is the default option for most local trips, much of the opposition to lowering or eliminating off-street parking requirements stems from concerns that insufficient parking in new development will create dangerous or otherwise undesirable conditions. For example, a proposal to reduce parking requirements in Concord, Massachusetts, led residents at a February 2025 public hearing to express concerns about "congestion and shortages," "overflow parking into residential neighborhoods," and parking enforcement.[51]

Thus, it's worth asking a fundamental question: without parking mandates, would real estate developers still build enough parking for their properties' tenants and patrons? Hypothetically, if those end users value on-site parking as an amenity and are willing to pay for it, the answer should be "yes."

But in practice, especially in urban areas, drivers often have alternatives to private off-street parking—namely, public and on-street parking—that are provided at well below market-rate prices. Not only does this reduce their willingness to pay separately for off-street parking, but it also likely reduces developers' willingness to provide it.[52]

Even with stringent minimum off-street parking requirements in new development, public parking provision often produces a wide gap between parking demand and supply, which users experience as a parking shortage. In May 2025, Boston's Zoning Board of Appeal cited such a shortage in South Boston in its denial of a zero-parking housing development near transit.[53]

Figure 4 offers some insights from economic theory for why this shortage arises. At a given price, drivers will demand a certain amount of public parking, which amount tends to decrease as prices increase. At the same time, the amount of parking supplied depends less on prices than on political priorities, one of which is usually to keep costs low for residents. In fact, a resident parking permit in Boston is free with residency verification.[54] These below-market-rate prices can induce substantial interest in public and resident parking beyond the availability of spaces.

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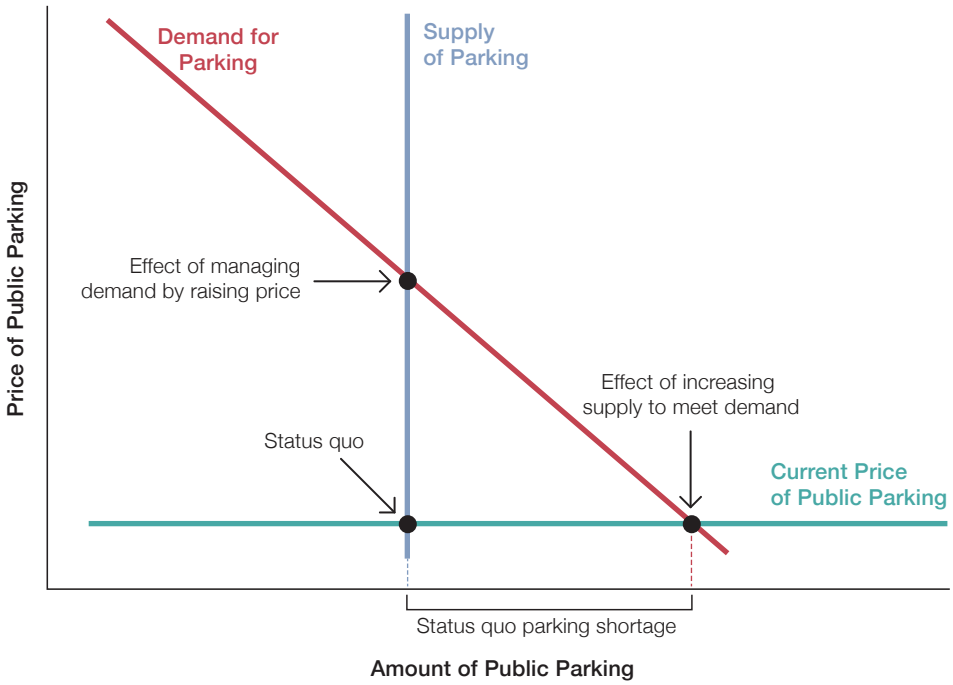
Hypothetically, a municipality could resolve this shortage in one of two ways: raising the price to curb demand to match supply or expanding supply to match the amount of parking demanded at the low price. For most public entities, at least in the short term, it's relatively difficult to change the overall amount of parking. Reallocating road space to parking or building parking on city-owned land would likely be controversial, expensive, and—especially in the latter case—take years from concept to execution.[55] If history is any indication, it may also involve aggressive intervention, including eminent domain, especially in dense cities with scant available land.[56]

Figure 4: Theoretical Model of Public Parking Supply, Demand, and Pricing



The ability of the private sector to substantially increase the publicly available parking supply is also limited, both by policy and by land use economics. In the case of Boston, much of Downtown, East Boston, and South Boston are subject to a "parking freeze" that caps the overall number of spaces in commercial parking facilities.[57] The first of these freezes was implemented in 1976 with the aim of reducing air pollution, and since then other freezes have targeted rental car operators and other airport-related activities.[58] As of 2023, Boston has the fourth lowest percentage of downtown land devoted to parking among the 100 large U.S. cities tracked by the Parking Reform Network.[59]

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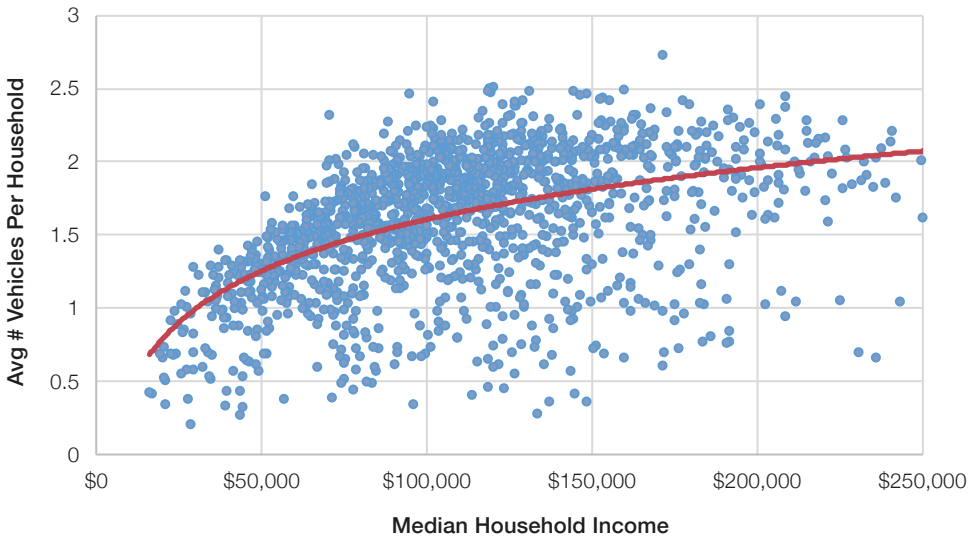
But it's also worth noting that, outside of East Boston, each of the freeze zones has the legal capacity for thousands of additional parking spaces.[60] Since the freezes were implemented, land values have risen enormously in Boston,[61] and thus other uses besides parking, including housing, are much more likely to maximize the value of that land for a developer. The Bulfinch Crossing development notably replaced a privately owned 2,300-space parking garage with several residential and commercial buildings in Downtown Boston between 2017 and 2024.[62]

Raising the price of parking is the more immediately actionable—and more easily adjustable—alternative to adding new supply. The political expediency of this market-based pricing scheme depends largely on cultural attitudes. If on-street parking is best regarded as an essential common resource, then, at an extreme, it would make no more sense to charge users for parking than it would to charge for entry into Boston Common.

But instead, if public parking is best thought of as a "club good" for which needs are highly individualized, organizing transactions as a market may better allocate resources according to those needs. In fact, academic research suggests that, when the price of on-street parking better reflects demand, road users determine where they park based on their priorities regarding cost, convenience, and other factors.[63] Aligning pricing with demand also greatly limits some of the social costs associated with parking, including the added traffic and emissions from vehicles searching for parking—a resolution to the "tragedy of the commons" effect.[64]

Moreover, underpriced public parking often acts as a regressive government subsidy. Every resident of a city pays the taxes needed to provide and maintain public space dedicated to car storage. Taxpayers who don't own a car, who are disproportionately low-income, are likely subsidizing those who do. In fact, at the census tract level, there is a moderate correlation between income and vehicle ownership in Massachusetts (see Figure 5).[65] The correlation's best-fitting logarithmic trend line suggests that a typical census tract with one vehicle per household has a median household income of $30,620, while a typical census tract with two vehicles per household has a median household income of $216,556.

Figure 5: Correlation Between Median Household Income* and Average Number of Vehicles Per Household at the Census Tract Level in Massachusetts, 2020–2024[66]



**Census tracts for which the median household income and/or average vehicles per household are not available in the American Community Survey, including every census tract with a median household income above $250,000, were excluded from Figure 5.*

A similar fairness argument applies to off-street parking requirements. In the words of the late UCLA professor Donald Shoup, "when cities require on-site parking everywhere, drivers pay nothing to park, and even the poor who cannot afford cars pay for off-street spaces they do not use. Directly charging drivers for their parking is much fairer than forcing everyone to pay for it indirectly."[67]

Reforming off-street parking requirements is also an important part of managing demand for public and on-street parking. This is because in an environment where the end user does not pay the full cost of that parking—whether it is subsidized by non-user residents of the same building or the general taxpayer—excessive parking supply will induce additional demand for it.[68] This is likely why the MAPC study referenced above found that the largest predictor of parking demand on a given property is how much parking is available.[69]

But in places with on-street and public parking, demand is far more than a function of parking availability on a given property. Among municipalities the MAPC classifies as "metro core communities" in the immediate Boston area, there is a striking correlation between the price of on-street parking permits and the recent growth in registered motor vehicles. Namely, every community that charges at least $25 for an annual parking permit saw the per capita number of registered vehicles decline between January 2020 and January 2026. But in urban communities where parking permits are free at least part of the year—among them Boston, Chelsea, Everett, and Revere—vehicle registrations are substantially outpacing population growth (see Table 2).

In an environment where the end user does not pay the full cost of parking—whether it is subsidized by non-user residents of the same building or the general taxpayer—excessive parking supply will induce additional demand for it.

Table 2: Recent Change in Motor Vehicle Registrations and Resident Parking Permit Pricing Among Boston Metropolitan Core Communities as of March 2026[70]

Municipality	Change in number of registered motor vehicles per capita*, 2020–2026 (%)	Price of annual non-senior, non-low-income on-street overnight parking permit
Revere	18.8%	Free
Chelsea	10.0%	Free in January and February. $10 from March to December.
Winthrop	6.4%	$5 per vehicle
Boston	4.6%	Free
Malden	4.4%	$10 flat fee per household plus $5 per vehicle
Everett	3.4%	Free in January and February. $10 from March to December.
Medford	0.6%	$20 each for household's first two vehicles. $30 for 3rd. $40 for 4th. $50 for 5th.
Melrose	–0.7%	Does not allow on-street overnight parking during winter months
Waltham	–0.7%	Free, but parking may be banned during "snow emergencies"
Belmont	–1.1%	Does not allow on-street overnight parking
Watertown	–1.7%	Does not allow on-street overnight parking during winter months
Arlington	–2.2%	$365 ($1 per day). Limited to 175 total permits issued townwide.
Somerville	–2.4%	$40 per vehicle
Newton	–2.7%	Does not allow on-street overnight parking during winter months
Cambridge	–2.9%	$25 per vehicle, with a limit of four vehicles per household
Brookline	–3.0%	Does not allow on-street overnight parking

**Population estimates used to construct the 2026 per capita vehicle figures are from July 2024, the most recent data available.*

Other forms of parking demand management, including those that affect private parking, have already been a notable part of Massachusetts parking policy in some communities for decades. Beyond its neighborhood-level parking freezes, Boston has also conducted pilots in some neighborhoods in which metered parking spots vary in price according to demand logged with sensors.[71] In 2019, the City Council even briefly debated charging residents for parking permits.[72]

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Some cities have taken a less market-based approach to managing demand. For example, in Somerville, residents of new developments located near transit are usually ineligible to obtain an on-street parking permit.[73]

Lastly, another aspect of parking demand management, while beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail, is probably the most important one: providing safe,

well-connected, frequent, and reliable transportation options outside of private automobiles. Beyond a certain density, single-occupancy car travel for every resident is unsustainable due to road capacity limitations, a fact that has led some communities, including Watertown, Massachusetts, to set *maximum* parking requirements for some new development projects.[74]

Recommendations and Conclusion

- **Reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements for new housing. Everywhere.** Parking requirements suppress rates of housing production and raise costs for end users. The result is an exacerbated housing shortage and more asphalt than is necessary. The harmful effects of parking requirements on new development are most likely to surface in urban and transit-oriented areas, but in suburbs with little on-street or public parking, developers have especially strong incentives to provide enough parking in their projects. Thus, communities of all types should re-examine the need for these requirements. In February 2025, the Massachusetts Unlocking Housing Production Commission recommended eliminating parking minimums entirely statewide for residential uses.[75]
- **Ground updates to parking requirements in data.** The American Community Survey shows how many cars are owned per household in every community, including separate statistics for rental and owner-occupied properties. Minimum parking requirements that are too close to the present car ownership averages in a community risk being a binding constraint on property owners, raising costs and resulting in fewer and smaller housing developments.
- **Re-examine parking requirements for commercial uses, too.** A 2026 UCLA study found that, amid a national sample of 17 cities, parking requirements for office buildings and shopping centers raised construction costs by up to 70 percent, compared to 39 percent for studio apartments.[76] And anecdotes abound of parking requirements making it cost-prohibitive to form small businesses.[77] Future research should focus especially on the potential for parking-lite commercial areas to facilitate mutual benefits for stores and surrounding uses, including an increased customer base within a walkable area.[78]
- **Start charging Boston residents for parking permits and offer vastly reduced prices for low-income households.** This would make it easier for residents who most need a car in Boston to find a space. It would also make the elimination of off-street parking requirements more effective by managing demand and minimizing spillover effects from parking-lite properties. Seattle, used as a case study in this paper in part because of its similar size and geographic constraints as Boston, charges residents $95 for a biannual parking permit.[79] Attaching fees to resident parking permits in Boston has been proposed before, most recently in 2019 by then-councilor Michelle Wu.[80]
- **Wherever practicable, price metered parking at market rate, including varying prices throughout the day.** In busy commercial areas, market-based metered parking is especially desirable because it can increase turnover rates, facilitating increased patronage of local businesses and limiting the need for motorists to circle the block looking for a space. Boston has piloted such a program in Back Bay and the Seaport, and early results showed that demand-based pricing also reduces instances of double parking and illegal parking in adjacent residential areas.[81]
- **Tie increased revenue from market-priced parking to better amenities in the local area.** Special funds that reallocate parking revenue to neighborhood initiatives could both make demand-based pricing more politically palatable and benefit nearby

Seattle, used as a case study in this paper in part because of its similar size and geographic constraints as Boston, charges residents $95 for a biannual parking permit.

businesses.[82] For example, planting street trees could raise property values and make existing commercial areas more pleasant places to walk. Parking revenue could also be allocated to improved signage that helps residents and patrons find available spaces within a pre-determined geographic area. Designation of these "parking benefit districts" is already explicitly allowed under Massachusetts state law.[83]

- **Encourage shared parking between businesses with different peak hours.** The elimination of parking minimums would pave the way for the adoption of legal agreements for sharing parking among multiple properties. For example, a bank that closes before dinner hour could share spaces with a restaurant next door.[84] These agreements could be either one-way (i.e., one business renting space to another) or mutual (i.e., customers of either business can use the other's parking during certain hours). Municipalities can encourage such arrangements through tax incentives or by facilitating contracts for shared parking through a parking benefit district.[85]
- **Manage demand not just with parking policy, but also with driving alternatives.** When people have good alternatives to driving or are likely to be traveling from close by, providing less parking can reduce traffic congestion.[86] Improvements to transit, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure are essential to comprehensive transportation demand management. Also helpful are longer-term efforts to make it possible to live near major job centers, shops, and institutional amenities. That means, at a baseline, allowing residential development in areas currently zoned only for commercial uses.
- **Unbundle parking costs from rents.** Many apartments come with a designated parking spot or spots, such that the rent and parking costs are indistinguishable. Thus, all else equal, households with multiple cars are paying the same amount for parking as households without one. If parking is truly going to function like a market, then parking costs for a given household should reflect how much parking the household needs. Unbundling parking costs and rents would shift cost burdens away from those who don't own cars, who are disproportionally low-income. In Seattle, where unbundled parking is legally required in larger buildings, it is also associated with lower rates of overall parking usage.[87] Massachusetts local officials should consider similar unbundling requirements or incentives for landlords of large developments.

Managing demand for parking also requires allowing more residential development near job centers, shops, and institutional amenities.

Even considered together, the above policies wouldn't eliminate traffic congestion or guarantee that every driver can find a convenient parking space. They also wouldn't prevent private property owners from providing parking if they wanted to do so. But they would make it possible for property owners, residents, and business patrons to make choices regarding where and how much they use and/or provide parking that better align with their individual needs. The ultimate results would be more and lower-cost housing production, expanded capacity for local community and economic development, and more judicious use of public space.

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About the authors

Andrew Mikula is a Senior Fellow in Housing at Pioneer Institute. Beyond housing, Andrew's research areas of interest include urban planning, economic development, and regulatory reform. He holds a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Mission

Pioneer Institute empowers Americans with choices and opportunities to live freely and thrive. Through expert research, educational initiatives, legal action, and coalition-building, we advance human potential in four critical areas: K–12 Education, Health, Economic Opportunity and American Civic Values.

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185 Devonshire Street, Suite 1101 Boston MA 02110 617.723.2277
www.pioneerinstitute.org Facebook.com/PioneerInstitute Twitter.com/PioneerBoston