

Parking Reform Curbs Housing Costs, Sprawl, and Pollution

More of what Washington's communities want—daycares, affordable homes, trees; Less of what we don't—asphalt and air pollution.

Most cities mandate a pre-determined amount of parking for all new homes and businesses, requiring more parking than people need, and saddling Washington communities with the waste and expense of chronic “overparking.” These unnecessary requirements drive up rents and home costs and write sprawl into law.

A simple policy change to cap parking mandates and exempt important building types can unlock needed homebuilding in our towns and cities, near jobs and transit, and help curb housing costs and rents. Limiting unnecessary parking mandates also cuts costs and makes space for what Washington communities need—childcare, senior living, thriving locally-owned businesses, and safe, vibrant downtowns—while protecting our health, air, and water from the pollution, toxic runoff, and tailpipe emissions from sprawling development.

The **Parking Reform and Modernization Act** (SB 5184/HB 1299) would limit or eliminate parking mandates in all urban areas, capping how many parking spots local governments can require for new homes and commercial buildings. It would also exempt from mandates those types of projects our communities need most, including senior living facilities, [daycares](#), [affordable housing](#), small-footprint businesses, commercial spaces in mixed-use buildings, and buildings undergoing a change of use.

Ditching excessive parking mandates protects people, pocketbooks, and local places

Make it easier to build affordable housing in Washington: Building parking is expensive—\$5,000 to \$60,000 per space. For affordable housing providers, operating on tight budgets, unnecessary parking mandates limit how many homes can be built and drive up per-unit costs. Every dollar spent on parking is a dollar not spent on housing; every square foot on a lot dedicated to pavement is a lost unit or bedroom or play area. Flexibility makes more valuable and responsible use of space and community dollars for affordable housing projects.

Parking flexibility saves people money: Status quo rules are out of line with car ownership. In Washington, 58% of renter households and a quarter of homeowner households own 1 or no cars, but in most cities and towns, it's illegal to build a home—detached houses or apartments—with just 1 parking spot. The added construction and space expense of a single parking spot in new housing can increase monthly rent by more than \$200—whether a tenant uses it or not. With flexibility for parking, we can keep money in Washingtonians' pockets and give more renters a chance to build their savings and financial foothold.

More homes of all shapes and sizes: Nixing unnecessary parking mandates unlocks more homebuilding than other zoning reform. A study in Colorado showed that building 0.5–1 parking space per home would increase profitable-to-build units by 41% over current (higher) parking mandates—more than upzones near transit (+13%) or ADUs (+22%) combined.

Prioritize precious space in our cities and towns—for people, not pavement: Two parking spots take up as much space as a small apartment. Unnecessary mandates prioritize pavement over additional apartment homes in a building and discourage family-sized homes with more bedrooms. Flexibility to right-size parking frees up space to build more homes where people need them—in the heart of our cities and towns, near jobs, transit, and schools.

Protect people of color and low-income Washingtonians from over-parking’s structural harms: Excessive parking mandates fuel sprawl and drive up housing costs, driving longer commutes, more traffic, and worsening the health risks of increased air pollution and heat islands—all of which disproportionately harm people of color, seniors, people living with disabilities, and low-income Washingtonians. By allowing flexibility to right-size parking, cities can curb dangerous pollution and encourage safer, healthier, affordable, more connected neighborhoods for everyone.

Pave the way for “Main Street” neighborhoods—not empty parking lots: Today’s parking rules amount to de facto “strip-mall development” mandates, advantaging big box and chain stores on the outskirts of town over local mom n’ pop businesses in the town center, within in walking distance of homes. With flexibility to add only the parking that’s needed, we can re-legalize safe, connected, and convenient “Main Street-style” neighborhoods in Washington.

Keep urban trees—and save rural farmland and open space: In our cities and towns, parking mandates force builders to cut trees to make way for pavement. On the outskirts of town, mandates force development to eat into farmland, forested areas, and open spaces. Pavement also increases polluted run-off into local waterways and causes dangerous heat islands. When more homes and businesses are made possible *within* our cities and towns, we protect nearby farms, forests, waterways, and habitat.

Shore up local budgets: Parking lots are one of the least productive uses of land, generating far less tax revenue per acre than housing, businesses, or mixed-use developments. Parking reform unlocks higher-value uses that deliver more local property tax revenue to fund schools, parks, and essential services—without raising taxes. In short, it turns underperforming asphalt into thriving, tax-generating neighborhoods that fuel community well-being.

How Washingtonians benefit from state leadership

Washington requires too much parking: We need parking—no doubt about it. This bill does not ban or restrict parking; it allows homebuilders and businesses the flexibility to add *enough* parking instead of consistently forcing *too much*. When given flexibility, builders will still provide off-street parking. Studies show that even when no parking is required, most new buildings still [choose to include it](#).

Statewide problems need statewide solutions: Washington's housing shortage crosses jurisdictional boundaries and requires coordinated solutions. Oregon, California, Vermont, Colorado, and others have successfully reduced parking mandates statewide.

Parking mandates are stuck in the past: No matter the reasons that mandates were added to local zoning codes in the 1960s, they are not working well today. In fact, they are causing harm. Overparking is wasting space and money and preventing housing, thwarting local businesses, and preventing community needs like daycares and senior living options. Adopted before the internet and online shopping and ride hail apps, parking zoning codes are outdated. But it's time to stop the damage inflicted by outdated 1960s guesstimates locking our towns into higher rents and sprawl.

Parking reform is for towns of every size: Parking mandates are arbitrary, excessive, and actively doing harm in communities, big and small, across the state. Even with little transit, [most jurisdictions that have repealed parking minimums are small and mid-sized towns](#). The cities of Spokane, Port Townsend, and Bellingham have already done so, and Shoreline is following suit. Every community would benefit from state standards to curb rent and protect people from the health impacts of pollution and pavement.