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Mission

Sustain Saint Paul champions abundant housing, low-carbon transportation, and sustainable land use in the City of Saint Paul through education, advocacy and political action, to ensure a more just and equitable city for all current and future residents



April 29, 2021

Saint Paul Planning Commission
15 Kellogg Blvd. West
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Planning Commission members:

We, the Board of Directors of Sustain Saint Paul, on behalf of our members, support “Option 2: Full Elimination” of parking minimums. We strongly encourage the Planning Commission to pursue that option.

We believe full elimination of parking minimums helps everyone -- renters, homeowners, small business owners, developers, and city planning staff. Option 2 is the best option for the following reasons:

Parking minimums make housing expensive.

When we build a parking space, we dedicate resources to housing a car instead of a human being. Mandatory parking adds, on average, \$142/month to a tenant’s monthly rent. That’s roughly a week’s worth of groceries for a family of four. They are forced to pay that \$142 whether or not they own a car simply because the developer was forced to build mandatory parking. Saint Paul is experiencing a housing crisis, and a full elimination of parking minimums is a powerful tool in our toolbox for building more affordable housing throughout the city.

Economic vitality depends increasingly on people, not cars.

Letting businesses dedicate less space to cars allows them to dedicate more space to their products and customers. That's good for the commercial tax base. The residential tax base also grows when more of a site can be dedicated to homes instead of parking. Housing projects can do the same, using less space for parking and more space for homes. More housing also means more customers for our local businesses. Everyone wins.

Option 2 is more equitable for neighborhoods and residents.

The automatic exemption for transit proximity in “Option 1: Reduce” benefits some areas, while leaving large areas of the city behind.

Wide swaths of the North End, East Side, and West Side would not benefit from the proximity to transit exemption. Option 1 would reinforce existing patterns of transit access and inaccess by allowing more density (that is transit supportive) where transit already exists, while requiring parking that undermines the density thresholds needed to attract transit service. The city can better level the playing field for economic development by fostering transit friendly density citywide.

We are facing a climate crisis because we incentivize driving.

Transportation is now the leading source of carbon emissions in our city. The car-centric way our city has developed over the past 80+ years is literally killing us through noise, poor air quality, climate change, and traffic crashes. If the city is serious about meeting its climate goals for 2040, we must stop incentivizing driving.

Option 1 (Reduced Minimums) retains the parking requirements bureaucracy.

The points and reductions system under Option 1 requires time and money to navigate. Developers will need to determine and provide amenities or services, which may not fit their project or be supported over time. Even if the trade-off system is easy to use once understood, the appearance of complication from the outset may deter some developers, particularly new or small developers that lack staff and experience to navigate multiple regulatory hurdles. Increased costs for parking administration will also hamper the ability to create affordable commercial and housing opportunities in Saint Paul, and be a particular barrier for small developers..

In summary

The choice is clear. "Option 2: Full Elimination" of parking minimums helps everyone -- renters, homeowners, small business owners, developers, and city planning staff. It keeps housing costs down. It cuts costs for small businesses. It adds to the customer base and tax base. It's more equitable. It removes artificial incentives for driving. It reduces administrative time and expense for city staff or developers. It improves the health of our climate. Everyone wins.

Please vote for Option 2, a full elimination of parking minimums.

Sincerely,

Sustain Saint Paul Board of Directors

