

November 2008
CHRS Adopts Parking Policy

The October CHRS Community Forum dealing with the zoning changes impacting parking in our neighborhood heard from several community representatives who have participated in the Zoning Task Force revision meetings and/or have reviewed and commented on the text amendment #08-06-2 that is before the Zoning Commission.

David Garrison, Vice Chair of ANC 6B's Planning and Zoning Committee, shared his testimony on the text amendment before the DC Zoning Commission in July. After careful review of his testimony and consideration of his presentation and his response to questions at the Forum, the CHRS Board has voted to endorse his critique and to notify the Zoning Commission that we agree with the position expressed in his testimony.

Mr. Garrison voiced his concerns about the proposal to dispense with minimum parking requirements for new construction projects. He pointed out that he realized that in bringing individual topics such as this forward for focused discussion, the Office of Planning seeks to be able to manage the overall process of implementing the Comprehensive Plan Update in an orderly and thoughtful way. However, as far as it concerns the topic of parking, he stated that it is difficult to assess the viability and logic of this particular proposal outside the context of proposals to implement other aspects of the Comp Plan. Moreover, the Zoning Commission needs to know what the City is willing to do on a range of related policy decisions regarding parking rules and incentives such as those overseen by DDoT and Department of Public Works (DPW) before they adopt parking zoning changes. He noted that decisions about how the zoning code should address parking must be made as part of the larger fabric of decisions about goals for the city's neighborhoods.

Residential Parking Requirements in the Comprehensive Plan: Policy LU-2.1-11 Ensure that parking requirement for residential buildings are responsive to the varying levels of demand associated with different unit types, unit sizes, and unit locations (including proximity to transit). Parking should be accommodated in a manner that maintains an attractive environment at the street level and minimizes interference with traffic flow. Reductions in parking may be considered where transportation demand management measures are implemented and a reduction in demand can be clearly demonstrated.

In view of Policy LU-2.1.11, Mr. Garrison questioned whether this section of the Comprehensive Plan supports the recommendation under consideration by the Zoning Commission. His further testimony continues below and is endorsed by the Restoration Society as our position on this issue:

“The sort of major policy change envisioned in the proposal to eliminate minimum parking requirements would surely result in increased competition among residents for an already scarce resource. It also goes beyond what is required to implement the Comp Plan. In order to achieve the proper balance sought by the Comp Plan, the city needs to consider the full range of government decisions impacting access by cars to our neighborhoods, including such critical, regulatory systems as the Residential Parking Permit (RPP) program. If, as proposed, the zoning code were to permit residential projects that had little or no on-site parking without the city also taking action to restrict the ability of new residents in such projects to get on-street parking permits, the result would be less on-street parking options for residents

Many of our Capitol Hill neighborhoods have reached a point where demand exceeds the supply of on-street, parking spaces. For those living in townhouses on blocks with no interior alleys and no off-street, parking areas, parking one's car on the street is the only option. Many Hill residents have already reduced their car ownership to the bare minimum. Introducing more demand into these neighborhoods while supply remains constant would fundamentally and detrimentally affect our ability to access and use our homes.

It isn't clear that people who are attracted to walkable neighborhoods like Capitol Hill want to abandon their cars. Residents want to access the nearby amenities in their neighborhood by walking and also have the option of driving to other areas of the city and the region. Since we have on-street space for residents to park near their homes, we would prefer to use those spaces for residents than for commuters or tourists. If the city wants to reduce the number of cars on city streets it should focus on the far larger problem presented by commuters.

It might make sense to use a tiered, pricing policy to discourage multiple car ownership among residents and to encourage full use of off-street parking resources, including garages, in residential areas. But, is it wise or effective to attempt to reduce car ownership among existing residents by either reducing the supply of parking spaces and/or increasing the demand for parking without increasing supply?

I support efforts by the city to reduce dependence upon automobiles in areas adjacent to major bus and transit nodes. However, I do not support approaches that would result in significantly reduced neighborhood parking options for existing residents. Until all elements of the city are able to come together around a coordinated set of decisions on parking, the Zoning Commission should withhold action on this proposal.”