

May 1, 2024

RE: SF 3752

Chair Dziedzic and Members of the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee:

This is my written testimony in support of SF 3752, a prohibition on minimum parking requirements. I am a currently professor of urban planning at Arizona State University, but I grew up in Minneapolis, and am a current part-time resident of the state. I used to own a bar and restaurant in downtown Minneapolis, which is where I first learned of the problems of minimum parking requirements. After my restaurant career I graduated with a Masters degree from the University of Minnesota, then went to UCLA to get a PhD, where I studied with Donald Shoup, who has written more about parking than anyone.

When I opened my restaurant, called Caffe Solo and located in the then Warehouse District, I was not subject to parking requirements. It never occurred to me that such things would exist. I learned about parking requirements when a friend wanted to open a coffee shop in Uptown Minneapolis, and he could not meet the required parking unless he bought and demolished the house next door. That struck me, as a business owner, as absurd and unfair, that the city would tell the business owner how customers would get to their store. The cost of providing the required parking was too great, and he never opened his café.

I then became an academic, in large part to study how parking requirements damage local economies. This has been part of my research for nearly 20 years. During that time, I have learned that my instincts about parking requirements being bad for business were correct, and that parking requirements are far worse for cities, communities, and businesses than I first understood. I would like to explain a few facts about parking requirements that support their full prohibition.

First, I want to make clear that prohibiting parking requirements is not a prohibition on parking. Most people drive to do most things. That I am opposed to parking requirements does not mean I am opposed to driving or cars. The evidence from places that have eliminated parking requirements shows that developers will provide fewer parking spaces than previously required, but few developers will provide no parking.

Second, required parking is an unnecessary burden on businesses. In no other realm do cities tell businesses about the characteristics of their customers—in the case of parking, cities are telling businesses that their customers will drive. The one-size fits all nature of parking requirements increases the cost of starting and maintaining a business. Typical parking requirements are three spaces per 1,000 square foot of building area, or about one square foot of parking per square foot of building. Consider that a surface parking space costs, on average, close to \$15,000 to construct, plus more to maintain. This means that a small café may have additional costs of \$50,000 just in order to open. In a time of inflationary pressures and higher interest rates, reducing this burden can make Minnesota more attractive to business start-ups.

Third, parking requirements inhibit the reuse and redevelopment of buildings. Parking requirements are often “accessory” requirements, where the parking must be supplied on the site. This is also a burden for the reuse and redevelopment of buildings, especially any building built before about 1950. (It was the 1950s when parking requirements became ubiquitous across the United States.) The heritage character of Main Streets and commercial districts is ruined when some of the buildings are torn down simply to accommodate required parking for an adjoining building.

Fourth, parking lots, especially surface lots, which are the cheapest to build though still a burden, as described above, contribute to ecological damage in stormwater run-off and increased urban heat. Rural and exurban communities are subject to water pollution in wetland habitats and recreational lakes from the asphalt required, as well as the chemicals and metals left behind from cars that are washed into natural systems. Parking requirements are not only an urban concern.

There are other concerns with parking requirements, such as increasing the cost of housing, especially for those who don’t drive, diminishing the walking environment because of curb cuts and driveways, and other effects heard in today’s testimony. Parking requirements are a relic of the American economy of the middle of the last century, and inhibit our ability to meet the economic and environmental challenges of this one.

Regards,

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