



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: BLAKE LYON AND KURT NABBEFELD, PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

CC: MAYOR KIM LUND

SUBJECT: INTERIM ORDINANCE ELIMINATING PARKING MINIMUMS CITYWIDE

DATE: DECEMBER 16, 2024

Mayor Lund issued *Executive Order 2024-02 – Expanding Housing Options in Bellingham* on November 21, 2024. The Order identified administrative and legislative actions intended to accelerate housing opportunities throughout the community. One action was to prepare an interim ordinance eliminating parking minimums for City Council consideration. Additionally, on May 20, 2024, the City Council directed staff to explore policies and regulations eliminating parking minimums; the attached interim ordinance responds to those directives.

Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC) 20.12.010 stipulates the number of parking stalls required based on the type of use occurring at a site. For example, each single-family dwelling unit requires 2 parking stalls, multifamily building stalls are determined by the number of bedrooms per unit while parking for commercial and industrial uses is generally according to square footage. This number of stalls is the minimum needed in order to be compliant with development standards.

When setting parking minimums, cities may use codes from other jurisdictions or parking demand rates found in the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) *Parking Generation* report or other studies. The ITE report is based on voluntary studies, many from suburban areas, with each having a variety of variables affecting parking demand. There is no formalized, true method or nationally recommended standard when it comes to how parking counts are established. This has led to an oversupply of parking spaces compared to the number of vehicles.

The creation, and over creation, of parking stalls can add costs to housing. Studies on the costs of parking have indicated prices often differ from state to state, even city to city, but research notes that surface lots (100-car single-level lot) can range generally between \$78 to \$200 per square foot, with a national average being about \$21,000 per space. Surface parking spaces in the state of Washington cost approximately \$83 per square foot. Therefore a 10'x 20' parking stall would cost approximately \$16,600 in 2023. Parking

structures are more expensive and can generally range between \$115 to \$300 per square foot, with average Washington prices coming in at \$123 per square foot or approximately \$24,600 per space (and can be up to \$60,000 per parking space).

Parking minimums reduce the land available for dwelling units, commercial and industrial space, landscaping, open space and preservation of trees or other environmental features. The 2016 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan encourages efficient use of available land and notes that reduced parking requirements should be explored (Policy LU-18, Policy LU-71, CD-2, CD-12, Policy H-18, and T-3). During the ongoing periodic update to the 2026 Comprehensive Plan, we continue to hear from community members how important reducing parking minimums is.

The attached interim zoning ordinance does not prohibit the construction of parking but allows the market to determine the appropriate amount needed on a case-by-case basis; this will reduce the cost of construction. The ordinance is a quick action that could promote construction of new residential dwelling units, while staff prepares final rules to be reviewed through a Type VI legislative process. Final rules will consider ADA parking and electric vehicle parking stall requirements as well as potential opportunities for reductions associated with affordable housing. **Staff recommends the City Council pass the interim ordinance and provide direction on additional items that should be reviewed with the final regulations.**