



Flexible Parking Standards

PARKING FOR NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

California is amid a housing crisis. Communities throughout the State are challenged with accommodating their fair share of housing production, many of which are exploring innovative solutions to that challenge. One such strategy is reexamining the number of parking spaces required for new residential development. Through its Zoning Code, the City of Ukiah has a unique opportunity to reduce parking requirements in order to remove barriers to and reduce costs for multi-family and low-income housing development.

What are Parking Standards?

Parking standards are regulations set forth by a county or city requiring new buildings to include a fixed minimum number of off-street parking spaces based on an assumed demand for parking generated by the building use.

This practice dates back to the early 1950s when rapid urban and suburban development resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of privately owned cars and a shortage of parking spaces.

Overview

Through their zoning code, most cities establish a minimum number of off-street parking spaces that must be created for each dwelling unit in a residential development. These requirements can be based on the number of bedrooms in each unit or on a per unit basis, and sometimes may even vary by project or location.

Parking standards are created to ensure that new residents have a dedicated space for their vehicles without creating a burden on on-street and public parking. However, these same parking requirements often lead to an increase in the cost of developing housing by increasing the land area required for a residential project. In turn, residential developments, especially multi-family and low-income projects, become increasingly more expensive and less affordable. Due to the increased cost of construction, tenants end up paying higher housing costs even if they don't use the parking spaces. Most often, the parking requirements go beyond what is actually needed to ensure that residents have adequate parking, which results in an excess of unused parking spaces.

Communities seeking to expand the supply of housing are revisiting their zoning codes to determine whether current parking requirements can be reduced. In doing so, those communities may reduce the cost of housing for residents, potentially lower development costs, and potentially free up land for additional dwelling units.

City of Ukiah Housing Element (2019-2027)

The Housing Element is one of seven State mandated elements that every general plan must contain. This Element provides an analysis of existing barriers to development, the community’s housing needs for all income levels, and the strategies to respond to those needs. Adopted on October 23, 2019, the City of Ukiah, with assistance from the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), updated its Housing Element for the 2019-2027 planning cycle. This update brought about substantive changes in format and content from the previously adopted Element to address the multitude of policy changes brought about by the 2017 Housing Bills package signed into law by the Governor.

One barrier to affordable housing the Housing Element addresses is parking standards and requirements. According to the Element, excessive parking requirements may serve as a constraint to residential development by increasing development costs and reducing the amount of land available for additional units or project amenities. As discussed in further detail in the Ukiah City Code: Zoning (Chapter 2) section of this paper, the City generally requires one parking space for one-bedroom apartment units and two spaces for two-bedroom apartment units. Relief from these parking requirements may be granted in some instances through the discretionary review process. These instances include day and nighttime use offsets, mixed-use developments, and special housing developments (i.e. housing for seniors and disabled persons).

Based on feedback from multi-family developers and community stakeholders during the Housing Element Update, the City learned that despite the flexibility in existing parking standards, the requirements may be unintentionally resulting in a reduction of the number of dwelling units feasible on a site. In particular, the requirements may serve as a potential constraint to the development of moderate-income, and affordable housing. To address this issue, the 2019-2027 Housing Element included the following goal, policies, and implementation program regarding parking requirement constraints:

Goal H-3: Remove governmental constraints to infill housing development.

Policies to Support Goal H-3

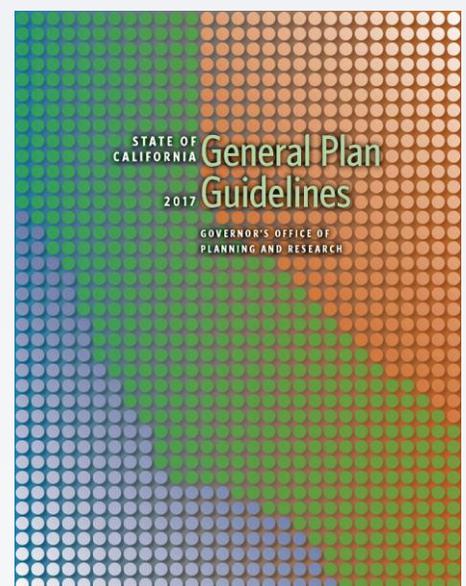
Policy 3-1: Improve building and planning permit processing for residential construction.

Policy 3-2: Encourage the use of density bonuses and provide other regulatory concessions to facilitate housing development.

What is a General Plan?

California law requires that every city and county adopt a general plan “for the physical development of the city and any land outside its boundaries that bear relation to its planning” (California Government Code Section 65300, et. Sec.).

A general plan serves as the jurisdiction’s “constitution” or “blueprint” for future decisions concerning a variety of topics including land use, health and safety, and circulation. The Housing Element and Land Use Element are two of the seven State-mandated elements of the Ukiah General Plan that set forth both land use and housing policies in the community.



The OPR General Plan Guidelines aids cities and counties in the preparation and content of general plans

Implementation Program to Support Goal H-3

3b: Develop flexible parking policies for residential development.

The intent of this policy is to reduce parking requirements; especially in zoning districts that allow for lower-income housing developments.

Responsibility: Community Development Department, Planning Services Division; Planning Commission; City Council

Funding: Department budget and other funding sources as available.

Schedule: Complete draft policy by June 30, 2020.

The following summarizes other key goals in the Housing Element related to the production and preservation of multi-family and special needs housing:

Goal H-2. Expand housing opportunities for all economic segments of the community, including special needs populations.

Goal H-4. Promote well-planned and designed housing opportunities and projects for all persons, regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital status, or national origin.

Goal H-5. Provide support for future housing needs.

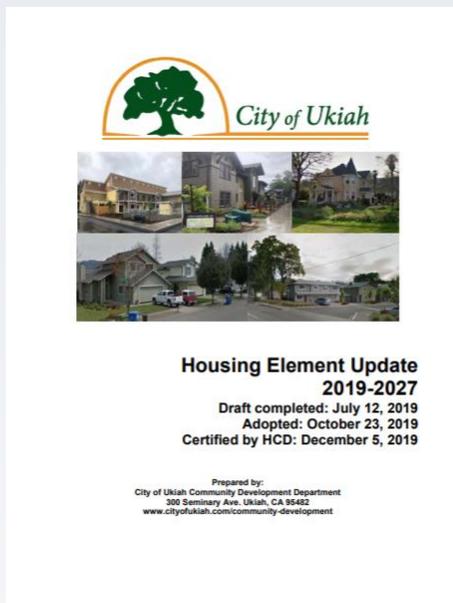
To help achieve these goals, the Housing Element includes the following policies related to the development of multi-family and special needs housing:

Policy 2-2: Encourage the development of a variety of different types of housing.

Policy 2-5: Facilitate the production of housing for all segments of the Ukiah population, including those with special needs.

Policy 5-2: Continue to encourage and facilitate public participation in the formulation and review of the City's housing and development policies.

Policy 5-3: Assume a leadership role in the development of all types of housing in the community.



The City of Ukiah Housing Element was adopted on October 23, 2019, for the 2019-2027 Planning Cycle.

City of Ukiah Land Use Element (1995)

Similar to the Housing Element, the Land Use Element is one of the seven mandated elements California law requires to be a part of a general plan. The purpose of a Land Use Element is to identify the locations and types of land uses that are to be designated throughout a city and its planning area. These land use classifications are intended to show the future use of lands during the life cycle of a general plan.

The Element provides broad classifications for how land can be used. Subsequently, these classifications form the foundation upon which the zoning and subdivision regulations are developed. It is from the implementation of these regulations, that the goals, policies, and implementation measures specified in the General Plan are applied. The culmination of all General Plan policy programs in the Land Use Element ultimately define what kind of uses are permitted and which regulations govern them.

Ukiah City Code: Zoning (Chapter 2)

A zoning code, or ordinance, establishes regulations that, in part, implement the General Plan and determine how property in a city can be used. Zoning codes typically establish zoning districts that specify allowable uses (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial) and development standards (e.g., structure height, setbacks, lot size, parking requirements). The Ukiah Zoning Code generally allows duplexes and multi-family residential developments in seven districts:

- Medium Density Residential (R-2)
- Heavy Commercial (C-2)
- General Urban (GU)
- Downtown Core (DC)
- High Density Residential (R-3)
- Community Commercial (C-1)
- Urban Center (UC)

Parking standards are set forth in Division 9, Chapter 2, Section 17.9198 of the Ukiah City Code. Generally, the Code requires two parking spaces for single family homes and duplexes, one parking space for one-bedroom apartment units and two spaces for two-bedroom apartment units (see Table 1). Mixed use projects containing a commercial component generally require one space per every 250 square feet of gross leasable space.

Table 1 – Number of Parking Spaces Required

Residential Parking Requirements	
Land Use	Number of Spaces Required
Single-Family Dwellings	2.0 spaces per dwelling unit
Duplexes	2.0 spaces per dwelling unit
Multiple-Family and Condominiums	1.0 parking space for one bedroom units; 2.0 parking spaces for two or more bedroom units

Source: Chapter 2, Section 17.9198(A) Number of Parking Spaces Required, 2020.

Parking Reduction Policies

The existing Zoning Code allows slight deviations from the parking standards through a discretionary review process depending on specific circumstances. For example, in any district, the sum of the separate parking requirements for each use in a mixed residential/commercial project may be reduced up to 35 percent when the City can make a finding that daytime and nighttime demand for parking spaces are offset. Parking requirements may also be reduced in Parking District 1 within the downtown area for projects containing pedestrian accessibility to services, are within a set distance from transit stops, or are located near City parking lots.

In any district, the Community Development Director may approve a reduction in parking requirements up to 30 percent for specific types of residential development. The reduction in parking for each use is dependent on a multitude of factors, such as the occupants age disabilities, or household size. Projects eligible for this reduction are housing developments with at least four dwelling units reserved for any of the following:

- Seniors
- Transitional housing
- Other special needs housing
- Emergency shelters
- Single room occupancies

The City also grants parking reductions for affordable housing projects. In any district where residential development is allowed, a reduction in parking requirements up to 20 percent may be granted for housing with at least four units made available to persons of low, very low, or extremely low income.

Potential Flexible Parking Considerations

Municipalities throughout the state are modernizing parking standards as travel habits shift away from single-occupancy automobile travel toward



Multi-family complexes with an abundance of parking spaces are common in Ukiah.

alternative modes of transportation. Local governments are taking new approaches to determining parking demand, particularly in areas that are walkable and have access to transit. Greater flexibility in parking requirements can reduce the amount of land that is allocated to parking and increase the amount of land for active uses.

Fortunately, cities have a multitude of tools at their disposal to further reduce parking standards if they so wish. As stated in the City of Ukiah Housing Element, the existing inflexibility in parking requirements may put an unnecessary constraint on the development of housing. The following section provides examples the Ukiah might consider implementing to address parking challenges.

Maximums in Lieu of Minimums

Parking requirements in the Zoning Code are currently stated in terms of a minimum number of required spaces. One of the biggest concerns with minimum parking requirements is they have the potential to waste a great deal of space by applying a “one size fits all” solution. Parking minimums fail to consider the many nuances of a residential development, such as tenant vehicle ownership rates and transit use. That is, parking minimums assume that every tenant owns one or more vehicles, which is increasingly not the case, particularly with lower income tenants. In many cases, parking lots are rarely fully occupied.

To address this issue, some communities have not only eliminated minimum parking standards but have adopted parking maximums instead. Rather than specifying a minimum number of spaces that must be provided, a maximum limit is placed on the number of parking spaces that may be developed as a part of a residential project. Replacing parking minimums with maximums can help developers avoid having to over-supply parking just to comply with regulatory requirements. Additionally, parking maximums have the potential to reduce development costs and greatly reduce the entitlement process timeframe because developers avoid the procedure of securing a zoning modification that allows them to provide fewer spaces than required.

Unbundled Parking

“Unbundling” parking is the practice of selling or leasing parking spaces separate from the purchase or lease of the commercial or residential use. This allows base housing costs to be lowered and individuals who do not need parking the flexibility of paying less for their dwelling unit. It also incentivizes individuals—where they have the option, to walk, bike, or use public transit for daily activities—to forego parking space ownership.

The Cities of Albany and San Jose included unbundled parking as a parking reduction incentive for multi-family residential projects. These cities allowed reduced parking requirements, via unbundling, for multi-family residential projects in pedestrian-oriented areas. Ukiah can apply a similar reduction incentive to residential developments across the City. While the City Code

allows the Community Development Director, based on making specific findings, to reduce the parking for residential development by a percentage, the City could implement additional provisions to allow or incentivize unbundled parking for residential projects.

Implementation of AB 744

Assembly Bill (AB) 744 is a bill signed into legislation in 2015 aimed at easing parking requirements for affordable housing. The bill allows affordable housing developers to build less parking than many local zoning regulations currently permit. AB744 is limited to a few specific types of housing that generally house population groups that tend to own fewer cars and drive less than the general population. Those instances include housing for special needs populations, and housing for low-income and very-low income people. The bill also applies to mixed-income developments that include a minimum number of affordable units. In all cases, these developments are required to have easy and convenient access to public transportation.

Under AB 744, if a developer of a qualified housing type requests to build less parking than required in the zoning code, a city must allow it, unless it can demonstrate that more parking is necessary. The bill further specifies that “demonstrate” does not entail the preparation of a vague “parking study.” The parking study to be conducted would have to be recent and based on “substantial evidence,” including area-wide parking availability, transit access, potential for shared parking, the effect of parking requirements on the cost of developments, and rates of car ownership among low-income, senior, and special needs individuals. This process shifts the burden of proof from the developer to the city, while in the process codifying the assumption that in general the populations in these types of development need and use fewer parking spaces.

AB 744 allows developers of specific housing types to request lower parking minimums as follows:

- 100 percent affordable housing within ½ mile of transit with frequent service: 0.5 parking spaces per unit
- 100 percent affordable housing for seniors, within ½ mile of frequent transit service or with access to paratransit service: 0.5 parking spaces per unit
- 100 percent affordable housing for developmentally disabled adults, within ½ mile of frequent transit service or with access to paratransit service: 0.5 parking spaces per unit
- Mixed-income housing within ½ mile of a well-served transit stop and with at least 11 percent of the units set aside for extremely low-income residents or 20 percent set aside for low-income residents: 0.5 parking spaces per bedroom

While Ukiah currently grants parking reductions up to 20 percent for affordable housing projects, it may consider amending its parking regulations to be consistent with AB 744.

Reduction in Residential Parking Minimums

Communities can reduce the number of spaces required per unit (i.e. from 1.5 to 1.0 spaces per bedroom or per unit) on a community-wide basis. This technique works well in particular zoning districts or locations for specific types of housing, such as age-restricted senior or affordable housing. Based on an analysis of communities with a similar population density, it appears that Ukiah’s parking requirements are higher than average. The cities that were analyzed as part of this memo include: Albany, Arcata, and Red Bluff. The following tables (Table 2) summarize each city’s parking standards for residential uses.

Table 2 – Parking Standards in Similar Communities

Residential Parking Requirements			
Land Use	City of Albany	City of Arcata	City of Red Bluff
Single-Family Dwelling	2.0 spaces per unit	Min: 1.0 space per unit	2.0 spaces per unit
		Max: 2.0 spaces per unit	
Two-Family Dwelling/Duplex	1.5 spaces per unit	Min: 1.0 space per unit	2.0 spaces per unit
		Max: 2.0 spaces per unit	
Multi-Family Dwelling	1.0 space per unit	Min: 1.0 space per unit	2.0 spaces per unit
		Max: 2.0 spaces per unit	
Senior Housing Development	0.5 spaces per unit	Min: 0.75 spaces per unit	N/A
		Max: 1.5 spaces per unit	
Residential Mixed-Use Development	1.0 space per unit	N/A	N/A
Affordable Housing	0.5 spaces per bedroom	N/A	N/A
Shared Housing	0.5 spaces per unit	N/A	N/A
Live/Work Space	1.0 space per unit	N/A	N/A

Source: Section 20.28.030 Parking Spaces Required, City of Albany, 2020. Section 9.36.040 Number of Parking Spaces Required, City of Arcata, 2020. Chapter 25, Article XXIII, Section 25.217(D) Off-Street Parking Requirements, City of Red Bluff, 2020.

Based on the above analysis of similar cities, Ukiah may consider amending their City Code to reduce the overall parking requirements for residential uses. Table 3 below provides a moderate reduction in parking standards, whereas Table 4 provides a more aggressive reduction.

Table 3 – Moderate Reduction to Residential Parking Standards for Ukiah

Residential Parking Requirements		
Land Use	Existing	Proposed
Single-Family Dwellings	2.0 spaces per dwelling	2.0 spaces per dwelling
Duplexes	2.0 spaces per dwelling	1.5 spaces per dwelling
Multiple-Family and Condominiums	1.0 parking space for one bedroom units; 2.0 parking spaces for two or more bedroom units	1.0 spaces per dwelling

Table 4 – Aggressive Reduction to Residential Parking Standards for Ukiah

Residential Parking Requirements		
Land Use	Existing	Proposed
Single-Family Dwellings	2.0 spaces per dwelling	2.0 spaces per dwelling
Duplexes	2.0 spaces per dwelling	1.0 spaces per dwelling
Multiple-Family and Condominiums	1.0 parking space for one bedroom units; 2.0 parking spaces for two or more bedroom units	0.5 spaces per dwelling

Conclusion

Many cities hoping to encourage affordable multi-family development have found reducing parking standards to be one effective and innovative solution. Whether through the implementation of State law, the reduction of parking standards community-wide, or the adoption of new parking reduction concepts, it is imperative communities reduce barriers to multi-family residential development during this housing crisis.

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