

Options for the Review of Minimum Parking Regulations

ISSUE

City Council, at its Public Hearing meeting on June 28, 2023, resolved:

“That the Administration report at the appropriate time about options to review parking minimum regulations.”

Administration understood the intent of this motion to be that City Council would like to understand the policy approaches available for regulating parking minimums in Bylaw No. 8770, Zoning Bylaw, 2009. This report provides an overview of the current approach, as well as a municipal scan and review of available literature on the topic. Limited engagement was also undertaken to inform this report. Four options are provided, which outline approaches for the regulation of parking minimums. The report also outlines next steps associated with this work, which will be based on the direction from City Council.

This report does not include details regarding proposed amendments to Bylaw No. 8770, the Zoning Bylaw, 2009 (Zoning Bylaw) and will therefore not result in changes to parking requirements. This report is intended to establish the direction of Administration’s review. Future reports will be brought forward with appropriate bylaw amendments based on direction from the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services (Committee) and subsequently City Council.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Regular Business meeting on May 31, 2023, approved the [Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan](#) (Action Plan). The Action Plan outlines initiatives to be completed by the City of Saskatoon (City), which are intended to drive transformational change within the control of local governments, regarding land use planning and development approvals, and which support the development of complete, low-carbon and climate-resilient communities which are affordable, inclusive, equitable and diverse.

An initiative outlined in the Action Plan is to reduce parking requirements with a focus on affordable housing. This was proposed to be completed in a two-phased approach:

- Phase 1: Propose reductions in parking requirements for affordable housing; and
- Phase 2: A broader review and gradual reductions of overall parking requirements.

City Council, at its Public Hearing meeting on June 28, 2023, approved [Zoning Bylaw Review - Amendment Package 6](#). At this meeting, a speaker raised the topic of “open option parking”. Following this discussion, City Council resolved:

“That the Administration report at the appropriate time about options to review parking minimum regulations.”

CURRENT STATUS

Current Context

Appendix 1 provides information about the City's current context for parking regulations, including:

- Policy direction for parking, transportation and land use planning;
- The regulation of off-street parking as required in the Zoning Bylaw;
- How minimum parking requirements are determined;
- Recent development appeals related to parking; and
- Complaints for both on-street and off-street parking.

The City has committed to undertaking a review for reductions in parking requirements for affordable housing as part of the Action Plan. Affordable Housing is defined in [Council Policy C09-002, Innovative Housing Incentives Policy](#), as:

“housing units that are affordable to low-income households with incomes below the Saskatchewan Household Income Maximums while spending no more than 30 percent of their income on housing.”

Currently, definitions and development standards specific to “affordable housing” do not exist in the [Zoning Bylaw](#), though there may be considerations for affordable housing through specific development proposals and zoning agreements.

Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

Parking requirements became prevalent in the mid 1900s when car ownership became more common. They were typically incorporated into zoning bylaws as a way for municipalities to mandate a specific number of parking spaces for new development. In recent years, a number of municipalities across North America have been removing or reducing parking requirements. A municipality may choose to remove or reduce parking requirements depending on the municipal context. A number of municipalities have made these changes to address affordability and climate goals, to streamline the development review process, as well as for benefits related to transportation mode-share, choice and urban form.

Appendix 2 outlines the approach taken by six Canadian municipalities. While these municipalities have removed or reduced parking requirements to varying degrees, all municipalities have maintained requirements in their zoning bylaws for accessible parking, bicycle parking and general standards for parking and loading spaces, such as parking space dimensions and surfacing requirements.

Some of the municipalities surveyed undertook a comprehensive parking utilization study to determine parking utilization rates. A parking utilization study aims to determine:

- How much parking is provided in a specific study area;
- How much parking is being utilized; and
- If demand exceeds capacity.

Other municipalities did not undertake a comprehensive parking utilization study as they determined it is possible to develop an effective approach in the absence of a study, and sufficient literature was available to support reducing or removing parking requirements.

While studies can provide point-in-time information about parking utilization, the studies do not provide a technical recommendation on the policy question of whether a municipality should or should not reduce or remove parking requirements. Administration was unable to find a clearly established planning practice which identifies a particular number of underutilized spaces to support a recommendation for or against removal of parking requirements. Instead, the common theme from the scanned municipalities was the decision to remove or reduce parking minimums is one of policy, not of scientific or technical justification. A parking utilization study has not been completed for Saskatoon. Consideration for a parking utilization study is outlined below, under “Alternative Approaches”.

Expectations and Outcomes in Other Municipalities

Most surveyed municipalities completed the changes to their zoning bylaws in the past few years. All municipalities indicated they have not seen a large reduction in amount of off-street parking being provided. Parking continues to be provided at similar rates to those previously required through their zoning bylaws. To gauge if there is an overall trend toward the reduction of parking, municipalities have been monitoring the number of provided parking spaces.

Removing parking requirements from the Zoning Bylaw does not mean parking will no longer be provided. Instead, it leaves the decision of how many parking spaces will be provided up to the developer based on market needs. Municipalities indicated that while there is no way to ensure this, it is expected that any change to off-street parking supply will be gradual and balanced as options for alternative modes of transportation become more viable over time.

The surveyed municipalities did point out a key benefit of removing parking requirements is that it allows more flexibility, as well as streamlines the development review process. In these municipalities it was noted as being particularly evident for renovation and reuse of existing buildings, as changing the use of an existing building can result in parking requirements the applicant is unable to meet, due to site constraints.

Review of Available Literature

There is a large body of literature about the reduction or removal of minimum parking requirements. A summary of the benefits and barriers to implementation is provided in Appendix 3.

The review also identifies trade offs to be considered when making decisions about parking requirements. The City of Edmonton’s website explains the trade offs related to parking as an option between three choices:

- Abundant Parking (amount of available parking);
- Economical (costs associated with homes and businesses); and
- Walkable (ability to walk to destinations).

For example, large parking lots with abundant parking take up a lot of space, which makes neighbourhoods less compact and less walkable. A large parking lot could otherwise be used to provide additional housing or as a commercial property providing amenities to residents, which supports a compact built form and the productive use of land. Abundant parking is also costly to build and maintain, a cost which is passed onto the consumer or homeowner/renter, regardless of car ownership, making it less economical.

OPTIONS

Four options for the review of minimum parking regulations are provided below. Committee direction on these options will guide the nature and scope of Administration's review. Regardless of the preferred option, Administration will conduct appropriate stakeholder and public engagement and will retain provisions in the Zoning Bylaw for accessible parking, bicycle parking, general parking and loading standards, such as the size and surfacing of parking spaces.

All of the options provide for either the removal or reduction of parking requirements. While the parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw may be amended, this does not mean physical parking spaces will no longer be built or that parking will be removed. Builders and businesses will have the ability to provide parking based on market needs.

Through the Action Plan, the City committed to a review of parking requirements for affordable housing and to undertake a broader review of the overall parking requirements with gradual reductions. This baseline is reflected in Option 1. To meet the Action Plan commitment, Zoning Bylaw amendments to the parking regulations for affordable housing will be brought forward for consideration in early 2024.

Option 1 – Reductions in parking requirements for affordable housing and ensure a standard and consistent approach with gradual reductions to overall minimum parking requirements.

The City has committed to reducing parking requirements for affordable housing, as well as a general review of parking minimums to ensure a standard and consistent approach with gradual reductions to parking requirements, as part of the Action Plan.

Administration considers this the baseline option and has sufficient direction to pursue this work, barring further direction from City Council.

Scope of Review

This option would be completed in two phases:

- Phase 1: Propose reductions in parking requirements for affordable housing; and
- Phase 2: Development of a more standardized, consistent and simple approach to the regulation of parking, such as standardized measures of gross area and building area and applying those measures consistently across districts and uses. Through this review, gradual reductions are expected to create consistency across districts and uses.

Timeline

Phase 1 could be completed by spring 2024. Phase 2 could be completed by summer 2025. Proposed amendments may be brought forward incrementally.

Benefits and Drawbacks

The benefit of this option is that it meets the City's commitment under the Action Plan and will reduce barriers to the provision of affordable housing. It will also simplify development standards by creating a consistent and standard approach for parking regulations. The drawback is that housing affordability and supporting the City's other goals for growth and development, would not be realized to the same extent as the options outlined below.

Option 2 – Major Reductions to the Minimum Parking Requirements

This option would maintain minimum parking requirements; however, the requirement would be significantly reduced. This would also consist of an overhaul of current Zoning Bylaw regulations for parking, including developing a more standardized, consistent and simple approach to the regulation of parking. For example, it would mean a move toward fewer standardized measures, such as gross area and building area, and applying those measures more consistently across districts and uses.

Scope of Review

In this option, Administration will focus its review and analysis on determining appropriate reductions to minimum parking requirements for all uses and zoning districts as well as how best to consolidate requirements around relatively fewer standardized measures.

Timeline

The anticipated timeline for implementation of this option would be within two years, upon receiving direction from Committee and City Council due to the review and analysis required to determine appropriate parking requirements. Proposed amendments may be brought forward incrementally.

Benefits and Drawbacks:

- It may improve affordability by reducing the amount of space required for parking, which can then be used for either more homes or more commercial space rather than parking;
- It can support the City's goals for sustainability and environmental leadership by reducing regulations that incentivize motor vehicle use in favour of more sustainable transportation options and enabling a more compact built form. It also has the potential to reduce impermeable surfaces and the associated urban heat island effect;
- It will provide some flexibility for developers with site design and supports an urban form and land use pattern, which promotes walkability and other modes of transportation;
- It will provide some flexibility for constrained sites, which is common for smaller infill sites or adaptive reuse properties;
- It may reduce the risk of parking over-supply; and
- Businesses, developers or landowners will be able to provide more than the required amount of parking, should they determine the market requires it.

Drawbacks for this option include:

- There is potential for a modest reduction in time to review an application due to the standardization of parking requirements;
- In some instances, more parking will be provided than what is desired by the builder/what the market demands, and the opportunity to use that land for additional housing or amenities will be lost;
- Reduced provision of parking spaces, in the absence of viable alternative transportation modes and infrastructure, may result in reduced accessibility and/or higher costs to access some locations for those who currently drive. It is important to ensure adequate alternative modes of transportation to driving are readily available, such as transit, cycling and walking; and
- This option may result in spill-over to on-street parking and may result in additional complaints or concerns from adjacent properties. This may generate the need for additional on-street parking management and enforcement.

Option 3 – Remove Minimum Parking Requirements

Commonly referred to as “open option parking”, removing all minimum parking requirements allows developers, homeowners and businesses to decide how much on-site parking to provide on their properties. In this case, the municipality does not have a role in determining the number of parking spaces required for development applications; however, any proposed parking must meet required parking standards, such as size of spaces and drive aisle width, as well as requirements for accessible parking and bicycle parking.

Scope of Review

In this option, Administration will focus its review and analysis on removing minimum parking requirements from the Zoning Bylaw and identifying whether any exceptions are appropriate. Administration will also propose amendments to other policy documents, which may be impacted by the change and identify any monitoring and follow-up reporting which may be advisable.

Timeline

If this option is selected, the anticipated timeline for implementation is within one year upon receiving direction from Committee and City Council. This is a shorter timeline than the other options presented due to reduced complexity in determining appropriate parking requirements.

Benefits and Drawbacks

This option yields the greatest number of potential benefits. In particular:

- It may improve overall affordability as it allows for space, previously dedicated to parking, to be used for either more homes or more commercial space, rather than parking;
- It may result in reduced times for review of permits in the development review process, as it removes calculations and reviews for parking as a requirement for development applications. The number of parking spaces provided will still be tracked for data purposes. Development applications will still be reviewed to ensure general parking standards, such as surfacing requirements and parking space dimensions, as well as to ensure requirements for accessible and bicycle parking are met;

- It will provide flexibility for businesses, developers and landowners to make decisions about how to most efficiently use their land, including how much parking should be provided based on market conditions;
- It can support the City's goals for sustainability and environmental leadership by reducing regulations that incentivize motor vehicle use in favour of more sustainable transportation options and enabling a more compact built form. It also has the greatest potential to reduce impermeable surfaces and the associated urban heat island effect;
- It supports an urban form and land use pattern, which promotes walkability, transit and other modes of active transportation;
- It will provide more flexibility for sites, which are constrained due to parking requirements, including smaller infill sites or adaptive reuse properties;
- It may reduce the risk of parking over-supply; and
- Businesses, developers or landowners would be able to provide additional parking beyond current requirements should they determine the market requires it.

This option also has several risks or drawbacks. Notably:

- There is no municipal regulation which would require developers to provide adequate parking. This may result in spill-over to on-street parking and may result in additional complaints or concerns from adjacent properties. This may generate the need for additional on-street parking management and enforcement;
- Reduced provision of parking spaces, in the absence of viable alternative transportation modes and infrastructure, may result in reduced accessibility and/or higher costs to access some locations for those who currently drive. It is important to ensure adequate alternative modes of transportation to driving are readily available, such as transit, cycling and walking;
- Opposition to change or fear of change - It is important to ensure there is a good communication strategy in place for the public to understand the recommended changes and trade-offs; and
- If developers begin to make choices in favour of less parking spaces, it's possible paid parking costs may increase at high demand locations and paid parking may be introduced where parking was previously "free". While this can be seen as a negative implication for drivers, it could also be considered as positive, as it signals land is being used efficiently and parking costs are becoming "unbundled" from the costs of retail goods/services and housing.

Option 4 – Combination of the Options Identified Above

Some of the surveyed municipalities have implemented a combination of options identified above. In this case, parking requirements could be removed or reduced in specific areas of Saskatoon or for specific uses. For example, the City of London removed parking requirements along major corridors and significantly reduced parking requirements in other areas of the city and the City of Calgary removed parking requirements for non-residential uses.

Timeline

The anticipated timeline for implementation of this initiative would be dependent on the complexity of the proposed changes. However, proposed amendments to the Zoning Bylaw could be brought forward within two years. Proposed amendments may be brought forward incrementally.

Benefits and Drawbacks

The benefits and drawbacks outlined in the option above would apply for the applicable areas and/or uses.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council that Administration undertake the work to pursue Option 3 – Remove Minimum Parking Requirements.

RATIONALE

The recommendation is based on the option which provides for the most benefits and best aligns with the City's goals of sustainable growth and an urban form and land use pattern, which promotes transportation options, environmental leadership, and supports economic development and business growth. Through the Action Plan, the City has committed to a review of parking requirements for affordable housing and to undertake a broader review of the overall parking requirements with gradual reductions. The recommended option goes beyond the Action Plan commitment. Since the recommended option primarily involves removal of regulation, rather than formulation of new regulatory standards as outlined in the Action Plan, it is expected to be less resource intensive, despite being more transformative and achieving the same affordability outcome.

Option 3 provides businesses and developers with the agency to be their own judge in determining needs of the market they are trying to serve in relation to parking. Businesses and developers make the same kinds of choices, independent of City regulations, when they decide on their business square footage needs, the number of tables in their restaurant, or the number of bedrooms in residential units, as examples. Option 3 allows the greatest flexibility to provide appropriate amount of required parking for each particular context, while regulations ensure consideration for accessible parking, bicycle parking and general parking standards are being maintained.

At this stage, limited engagement has been undertaken on these options. In discussion with development industry stakeholders, the recommended approach is supported by some, while others preferred Option 2 - major reductions to the minimum parking requirements; or Option 4 - a combination of the options presented. No industry stakeholders expressed support for a status quo approach or minor changes.

It is anticipated Option 3 could be completed within one year of receiving direction from Committee and City Council, based on current resources. If extensive engagement is required at the direction of Committee and City Council, beyond what is identified below, this timeline may be extended.

Alternate Recommendation

The removal of minimum parking requirements is a significant shift from the current state of regulations. Reductions in parking requirements, without complete removal of parking requirements, can still be supportive of the City's strategic goals and allow for an incremental approach to changes in parking requirements. Should Committee and City Council wish to pursue incremental changes to the parking requirements, as an alternative to the recommendation provided above, Administration would recommend pursuing a review based on the following variation of Option 4 - Combination of the Options Identified Above. Areas to consider reductions or removal would include the Corridor Planning Program Areas; Business Improvement Districts; mixed use zoning districts; industrial, affordable and supportive housing; and accessory dwelling units. Reductions and standardizations for other uses could also be considered.

Engagement has not been undertaken specific to the alternate recommendation noted above. Should Committee and City Council decide to take this approach, further engagement would be completed.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

Parking Maximums

Parking maximums restrict the amount of parking to no more than the rate identified as a maximum. Parking minimums alone do not have a maximum number of spaces which can be provided.

Administration has not included parking maximums as an option in this report, as it was recommended by surveyed municipalities that, if parking maximums are applied, a parking utilization study should be completed to support identification of appropriate parking maximums to ensure an adequate parking supply is being made available. A parking utilization study would result in additional time and costs for the project. The benefits of parking maximum requirements, such as supporting a compact urban form, affordability and encouraging a mixed-modal transportation share, can also be obtained through the removal of parking minimums. Parking maximums could be considered at a later date.

Parking Utilization Study

The presented options are based on an overview of the current approach used to regulate parking, as well as a municipal scan, literature review and limited engagement.

Committee and/or City Council has the option to request a detailed parking utilization study. This study would provide local point-in-time data about the utilization of parking in the City. This approach would require a consultant as the City does not have the resources or expertise to complete this study in-house. If this approach is taken, Administration will report back to Committee with potential costs and timelines for such studies.

Zero-Emissions (Electric) Vehicle Parking

There are currently no zero-emissions (electric) vehicle parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw. A Zero-Emissions Vehicle Adoption Strategy is currently in development. Pending the results of this strategy, electric vehicle requirements may be considered at a later date.

On-Street Parking and the Residential Parking Program (RPP)

This report does not make recommendations as it relates to on-street parking management. Other surveyed municipalities, who have removed or substantially reduced off-street parking requirements, have managed on-street parking separately. Administration is not recommending policy changes to on-street parking be considered as part of this project.

While broad impacts to on-street parking are difficult to forecast, removal of off-street minimum parking requirements may result in increased demand for on-street parking regulation and enforcement, and increased parking enforcement costs could be anticipated. Depending on the land use pattern of a given area and the respective roadway profiles, certain areas may be better poised to accommodate increases in on-street parking demand.

There may also be an increase in complaints related to parking congestion; however, the surveyed municipalities stated they have not seen a large increase in complaints due to the removal or reduction of parking requirements.

Presently there are Residential Parking Programs (RPP) or Limited RPP zones in the Caswell Hill, City Park, Pleasant Hill, Riversdale, Silverwood Heights and Varsity View neighbourhoods. These RPP and Limited RPP zones provide permits for low-density dwelling units, which include one-unit dwellings, two-unit dwellings and semi-detached dwellings, which do not have minimum parking requirements, as well as multiple-unit dwellings if the parking provided on-site is lower than what is currently required by the Zoning Bylaw. If there were changes to minimum parking requirements for multiple-unit dwellings, there may be impacts to on-street parking congestion, and potential RPP policy changes would require evaluation. On-street parking management would be reviewed and monitored to assess the impact of the removal of parking minimums over time.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

In preparing this report, limited engagement was undertaken. This included engagement with the development industry, the business improvement districts, business groups, as well as a survey which was circulated to the Citizen Advisory Panel. Results of this engagement are outlined in Appendix 4.

Administration's recommendation provides a bold step towards meeting the City's strategic goals for growth. In advance of this report being made public, a frequently asked questions document has been provided on the City's webpage, at saskatoon.ca/housingactionplan, to provide the public information on the Action Plan and the review of parking requirements. A comprehensive communications strategy will be developed, based on the recommendation provided by Committee and City Council, to educate and inform the public about proposed changes to parking requirements.

In addition, an engagement strategy will be developed based on the recommendation provided by Committee and City Council. Engagement will include:

- Public engagement, including consultation with Community Associations. This may include in-person and virtual information sessions.
- Further industry engagement, specific to implementation; and
- Engagement on technical requirements as they relate to parking standards.

If an expedited approvals approach for changes to parking minimums is preferred, and to reduce the costs and administrative time required for engagement, public and further industry engagement could be more limited in nature with a focus on education and information, while ensuring technical requirements are met.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A detailed project plan will be developed based on the recommendation provided by Committee and City Council. All options provided would be completed in-house, with existing staffing resources. If additional considerations are pursued, such as parking maximums or a parking utilization study, there would be additional funding implications, as more time, resources and potentially external consultant support would be required.

Administration is proposing the review of parking requirements be funded through the Housing Accelerator Fund, as it is aligned with an identified initiative. At the time of writing this report, Administration has not received confirmation of this funding from the Government of Canada. Should the City be unsuccessful in receiving this funding, or should additional funding be required to complete this project over the amount available through the Housing Accelerator Fund, Administration will report back to Council with options for funding this project.

NEXT STEPS

Next steps for this project will be based on the preferred option recommended. In general, these will include:

- Administration will undertake engagement on the preferred option as noted in this report;
- Administration will develop recommendations for amendments to the Zoning Bylaw; and
- Administration will identify and review processes or documents which require changes based on the preferred option. These will be brought forward to Committee and City Council as required. This may include a review of processes relating to traffic impact assessments and bylaw enforcement.

Further, through the Action Plan, the City has committed to a review of parking requirements for affordable housing. To expedite removing barriers for affordable housing development and to meet the Action Plan commitment, regardless of the option selected by Committee, Zoning Bylaw amendments to parking regulations, specifically for affordable housing, will be brought forward for consideration in early 2024.

APPENDICES

1. Current Context for Parking Regulations
2. Scan of Other Canadian Jurisdictions
3. Available Literature About Reducing or Removing Minimum Parking Requirements
4. Engagement Summary Review of Minimum Parking Requirements

REPORT APPROVAL

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