

Reducing Parking Mandates Can Unlock Housing Affordability in Connecticut

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Public Hearing on HB 7061, An act concerning mandatory minimum parking requirements

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Co-chairs Rahman and Kavros DeGraw, Vice Chairs Chafee and Needleman, and members of the Joint Committee on Planning and Development, thank you for allowing me to offer informational testimony relating to House Bill 7061, titled “An act concerning mandatory minimum parking requirements,” which would prohibit local governments from requiring a minimum number of off-street parking spaces. I am Charles Gardner, a research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. I study housing policy and affordability across the country, and, as part of my research, I have recommended reforms to parking policy like those proposed in this bill as an important means of reducing housing costs.¹ In addition to their benefits for housing, these reforms are simultaneously pro-business and pro-environment.

Currently, Connecticut towns and cities routinely require property owners to dedicate large amounts of space on their property exclusively to motor vehicle storage. This requirement serves as the condition for using those properties for safe and ordinary purposes, such as residences or retail. These mandates are typically inflexible and are applied regardless of context and even common sense. For instance, some cities require bars and other drinking establishments to provide a minimum number of spaces for their patrons’ cars, no matter that the business owner might prefer to offer little or no parking to encourage use of transit, taxis, or other ride-hailing services.²

For housing, numerous articles, policy papers, and studies have shown that parking mandates reduce housing supply and drive up rents and prices, contributing to Connecticut’s and the nation’s ongoing affordable housing crisis.³ These mandates take the biggest economic bite in urbanized areas with high

¹ See Salim Furth, Emily Hamilton, and Charles Gardner, “Housing Reform in the States: A Menu of Options for 2025,” (Mercatus Center at George Mason University, August 14, 2024).

² See, for example, City of Waterbury, Connecticut Zoning Regulations (Effective May 16, 2011), 95, requiring seven parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area for eating and drinking establishments.

³ See, for example, “Study: Hartford, New Haven Hurt by Abundance of Parking,” Connecticut Public Radio, March 31, 2014; Todd Litman, “Parking Requirement Impacts on Housing Affordability,” Victoria Transport Policy Institute (January

land values, where a single structured parking space can add as much as \$50,000 to the cost of an apartment.⁴ Mandates can increase costs for all housing types, however, with burdens falling disproportionately on lower-income households.⁵ These mandates contribute not only to cost pressures but also to environmental degradation by requiring landowners to construct more impervious area than they might otherwise desire, increasing stormwater runoff and intensifying urban heat island effects.⁶

Although awareness of the negative impacts of minimum parking mandates has been growing for decades, cities and states have been hesitant to repeal them completely without any examples to draw on for precedent. Today, however, not only does Connecticut have its own experience with taking steps toward limiting parking mandates,⁷ but its capital of Hartford was an early adopter of bold reform when it wholly eliminated minimums for new developments in 2017.⁸ Connecticut also has the experience of suspending parking minimums during the pandemic, when many businesses successfully repurposed their required parking for outdoor seating for patrons pursuant to executive order.⁹

Empirical research is also expanding. Studies on the elimination of parking minimums in Buffalo, NY, and Seattle, WA, show that, following reforms, 68 percent of Buffalo projects and 59 percent of Seattle projects included fewer parking spaces than previously required, resulting in a total drop in new parking spaces of 20 percent in Buffalo and 40 percent in Seattle.¹⁰ In Seattle, elimination of the minimums contributed to the production of more than 35,000 housing units and saved over \$530 million in costs that would otherwise have been passed on to tenants or buyers.¹¹ In Buffalo, parking reform boosted housing production, promoted adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and led to the construction of projects where parking was priced separately from housing, allowing residents who don't need parking to save money.¹² Reduced costs from the lack of mandated parking have been found to have the potential to lower monthly rents by \$200 or more.¹³ Reform continues to spread, with dozens of US towns and cities now having repealed or largely repealed their parking minimums¹⁴ while

31, 2025); and C. J. Gabbe, Gregory Pierce, and Gordon Clowers, "Parking Policy: The Effects of Residential Minimum Parking Requirements in Seattle," *Land Use Policy* 91 (February 2020).

⁴ Hannah Hoyt and Jenny Schuetz, "Parking Requirements and Foundations Are Driving Up the Cost of Multifamily Housing," Brookings Institution, June 2, 2020.

⁵ Lewis Lehe, "How Minimum Parking Requirements Make Housing More Expensive," *Journal of Transport and Land Use* 11, no. 1 (2018).

⁶ Abigail Araya, "The Climate Cost of Free Parking," *Smart Growth America*, September 17, 2024.

⁷ See House Bill 6107, enacted as Public Act No. 21-29.

⁸ Philip Rojc, "No More Parking Minimums in Hartford," *Planetizen*, December 22, 2017; and Sarah C. Bronin, "Rethinking Parking Minimums," *Planning* (2018).

⁹ Office of the Governor, Executive Order No. 7MM (May 12, 2020), providing that "Any Covered Law requiring a minimum number of parking spaces or prohibiting Outdoor Activities from taking place in parking lots is suspended to the extent required to permit such Outdoor Activities. . . ."

¹⁰ Catie Gould, "Parking Reform Legalized Most of the New Homes in Buffalo and Seattle," Sightline Institute (April 13, 2023); and Daniel Baldwin Hess and Jeffrey Rehler, "Minus Minimums," *Journal of the American Planning Association* (March 12, 2021).

¹¹ Gould, "Parking Reform Legalized Most of the New Homes in Buffalo and Seattle."

¹² Emily Hamilton and Sloane Argyle, "Case Studies on Smart Zoning Reforms, Part Four: Removing Parking Requirements in Buffalo, New York" (Mercatus Center at George Mason University, February 22, 2022).

¹³ Seth Goodman, "How Much Does One Parking Spot Add to Rent?," *Reinventing Parking*, June 2, 2015.

¹⁴ Parking Reform Network, "Parking Mandates Map" (dataset), accessed February 26, 2025, <https://parkingreform.org/resources/mandates-map/>.

others currently consider doing the same.¹⁵ States have been proposing increasingly ambitious reforms as well, with Colorado enacting a major parking minimum reform in 2024.¹⁶

Although repealing parking minimums is generally recognized as sound policy, some argue that repeal should be done at the local rather than state level. However, Connecticut's localities exercise their zoning powers pursuant to express state authorization, and in Connecticut's zoning enabling act, towns and cities have never been authorized to impose parking minimums by prescribing a required number of parking stalls.¹⁷ The proposed bill clarifies the existing language and would set all Connecticut localities—and all Connecticut residents—on equal footing under the law. The urgency of the housing crisis and the need to free Connecticut businesses from onerous government mandates provide further justification for state involvement.

Eliminating parking minimums no longer is just a policy idea but has become a policy reality in many cities across the country. With the enactment of this bill, Connecticut would become the first state to eliminate parking minimums, positioning itself as a leader in parking reform nationwide. It appears that the bill would apply not only to new projects but also to existing uses, a pro-business move that would encourage reuse and redevelopment of Connecticut's historic urban spaces where parking cannot be provided easily or at all. Parking would still be permitted, but in a quantity chosen by the owner or developer rather than mandated by the government. Based upon the experience of jurisdictions that have repealed parking minimums, the reforms proposed in this bill would be an important step toward addressing the state's housing crisis while providing other economic and environmental benefits for Connecticut residents.

¹⁵ See, for example, John Herrick, "Citywide Parking Minimums Could Soon Be History in Boulder: Here's What It Means," Boulder Reporting Lab, January 23, 2025.

¹⁶ Heather Willard, "Gov. Polis Signs Bill Eliminating Parking Minimums for Some Developments," KDVR, May 10, 2024.

¹⁷ See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-2(a)(1), stating that cities, towns, and boroughs may regulate "the height, number of stories and size of buildings and other structures; the percentage of the area of the lot that may be occupied; the size of yards, courts and other open spaces; the density of population and the location and use of buildings, structures and land for trade, industry, residence or other purposes" and certain other elements. Nowhere in this list of authorized powers is parking or parking spaces mentioned.