



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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February 3, 2010

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600 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

Councilmember Sally J. Clark, Chair
Committee of the Built Environment
Seattle City Hall
2nd Floor
600 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Commuter Parking Near Light Rail Stations

Dear Mayor McGinn and Councilmember Clark,

Thank you for requesting the Seattle Planning Commission's independent advice regarding commuter parking near Seattle's light rail stations. We reviewed the current policy regarding long-term parking at light rail stations and are aware that a new policy is imminent. We examined this issue and offer the following recommendations for your consideration.

PLANNING COMMISSION CONSIDERATIONS

- The City should align land use strategies, transit service and public investment in support of vibrant, walkable communities.** Parking policies should support transit ridership as well as mixed-use redevelopment in proximity to high capacity transit stations over time. Ultimately, these neighborhoods should facilitate walking or biking for most daily activities, including accessing the light rail station.
- Seattle is currently in a development lull and market conditions for near-term redevelopment in these neighborhoods are lackluster.** We recognize that there are surface parking lots in station areas that have vacant stalls throughout the work week. Allowing commuter parking on an interim basis at these existing, privately owned lots could:
 - Help introduce riders to Link, support ridership and reduce auto trips to downtown.
 - Generate parking revenue for local neighborhood businesses and attract commuters who might patronize these businesses before and after riding Link.
 - Activate currently vacant *and* underused lots until market conditions warrant their conversion to higher and better uses. We believe that over the longer term, any proposed mixed-use development of a density seen in typical mixed-use buildings in Seattle (e.g. floor area ratio (FAR) greater than 2-3) will be able to outbid long-term surface parking for land. As such commuter parking should be considered as an interim use that will not undermine higher and better uses.

3. **Land use regulations should guide and enable future growth.** For station areas in particular, parking policy should support redevelopment; our regional investment in light rail will be better served with mixed-use, transit oriented communities than by surface parking lots. The Commission's recommendations below try to balance these short and long-term goals.

PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding current rules for parking in station areas, the City should:

1. **Continue to prohibit:**
 - **demolition of buildings for use as parking lots;**
 - **parking as an interim use on sites where buildings have been demolished** (like the lot on Capitol Hill where Bimbos, Kincora, and Manray, used to be); and
 - **new single-use parking structures in station areas.**
2. **Allow commuter parking in existing parking lots and structures.** Currently, commuter parking is prohibited in light rail station area overlay districts. However, under current circumstances, allowing commuter parking could be a near term benefit to transit ridership, local businesses and property owners in station areas. Commuter parking should be defined as either a shared use (e.g. sharing parking at a religious or community facility) or no more than 30% of the spaces in an existing parking lot.
3. **Require a simple permit for accessory commuter parking at existing lots.** If an owner of an existing parking lot could demonstrate that required parking would not be displaced, then it should be possible to provide an over-the-counter permit that would register how many stalls are being rented for commuter parking.
4. **Include a sunset clause for commuter parking as an accessory use.** The Commission agrees with DPD that any policies should be adopted on an interim basis and revisited in 2012.

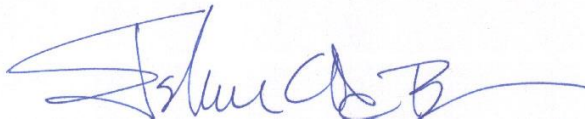
The City should also examine other strategies to reinforce policies aimed at limiting the development of commuter parking in station areas:

1. **Encourage redevelopment with rezones that will allow more intensive use of land.** Over the longer term, mixed-use development will be more attractive investments than surface commuter parking lots if there is appropriate zoning. In most circumstances, existing zoning would already allow development of sufficient density to be more valuable than commuter lots, but strategic upzones could create a greater incentive for redevelopment. Form-based and performance-based zoning overlays can be used together with upzones to help communities tailor more intense land uses to the place-specific needs of their neighborhoods. Ultimately, both near-term and long-term policies should encourage the transition of these station area neighborhoods into vibrant, diverse transit oriented communities. In the spring of 2010, the Planning Commission will release its "Seattle Transit Communities" report that will outline policy and regulatory recommendations for long-term redevelopment at stations and along transit corridors.

2. **Improve Transit Integration.** Light rail can serve more people who live outside of station areas if there is frequent streetcar, bus or shuttle service to the stations. The City should continue to work with King County Metro and Sound Transit to provide frequent and reliable transit service to stations. Many high capacity transit station areas in other cities have 40-50% or more riders start or end their trip with a connecting bus. Over time, improved transit connections will reduce the need for parking in station areas and create safer, more vibrant and walkable neighborhoods.
3. **Create parking maximums in station areas.** As part of a larger parking strategy near station areas, the City may want to impose parking maximums around transit stations similar to regulations governing parking downtown. Under existing zoning, no more than 145 spaces per lot may be provided as surface parking in all commercial zones except C2 zones outside of urban villages.
4. **Do not require additional landscaping or pedestrian amenities.** The Commission recommends not requiring additional landscaping, pedestrian or bicycle amenities solely for the interim commuter parking use beyond what is already required. While it is essential to provide for public safety, it is also important to minimize the perception that surface parking lots are a long-term neighborhood amenity. Furthermore, owners who have invested in significant site improvements as a result of station area parking requirements may have less incentive to redevelop in the future.
5. **Develop a broader community parking strategy in station areas.** In each station area, demand for land, transit service and other factors will vary. A successful parking policy in one area could be unsuccessful in another. In the long run, each station area should establish the right combination of incentives and restrictions to support a transition to the density anticipated for these areas and a sustainable place for people to live, work and play. These strategies should:
 - balance the current needs of business owners and residents;
 - discourage dependence on automobile travel over the long-term; and
 - consider a method for focusing expenditures of parking taxes and fees within the neighborhood where they are collected, thereby creating a direct feedback mechanism of costs and benefits to the local area. While revenues from additional parking taxes or fees imposed on accessory commuter parking in station areas could pay for amenities within the business districts, it is not clear that the tax would generate enough revenue to cover administrative costs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our recommendations to you on this important topic. We look forward to working with you and your staff as you develop regulations. If you have any questions, please contact me or Barbara Wilson, the Commission's Executive Director.

Joshua Brower, Chair



Seattle Planning Commission

cc: Seattle City Council
Deputy Mayor Phil Fugii
Diane Sugimura, Karen White, Marshall Foster, Lyle Bicknell, Mike Podowski, DPD
Grace Crunican, Bob Powers, Tracy Krawczyk, Ann Sutphin, Meghan Shepard, Mary Catherine Snyder, SDOT
Norm Schwab, Rebecca Herzfeld, Council Central Staff

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURE & RECUSAL:

- Chair Josh Brower disclosed that his firm, Tuper Mack Brower, PLLC, represents developers of commercial, residential and mixed-use projects throughout Seattle. Additionally, he is council to Sound Transit on a TOD project, which is not located near or adjacent to an existing, active Link station.
- Vice Chair Leslie Miller disclosed that she is a member of the Othello Station Community Advisory Team that works on issues related to development of the Othello Station area, which includes lots that would be impacted by the recommendations in this letter.
- Commissioner David Cutler's firm, GGLO, was under contract with the City to conduct station area planning for the North Rainier Urban Village Neighborhood Plan Update, and represents clients who own and may develop land surrounding the existing and proposed LINK rail stations.