



Figure 1. Parking Lot

Framing the Conversation to Establish Stakeholder Buy-in

Removing Minimum Parking Requirements in Edmonton

Katie Lee (University of Manitoba)
In Collaboration with Trevor Illingworth (City of Edmonton)

1.0 Introduction

Speaking to the public about cars and parking typically produces strong and emotional opinions. The City of Edmonton successfully navigated this topic through an effective public engagement campaign, which aimed to produce constructive conversations about how the City regulates parking and city characteristics influenced by parking. With the support of numerous advocacy groups, the City of Edmonton removed minimum parking requirements in 2020.

The City of Edmonton's careful messaging and mindful framing of parking helped secure buy-in from decision-makers, the public, developers and community groups. This case serves as an example for other jurisdictions that seek to remove minimum parking requirements.

"Parking is a powerful, but often hidden force that shapes how our communities are designed, and influences every aspect of how people live, work and move around."

- Kim Petrin, City of Edmonton

2.0 Background and Context

Minimum parking requirements were introduced in the 20th century in many North American cities to accommodate peak demand on individual properties, including businesses and homes (City of Edmonton, 2019). As described in zoning by-law policy documents, these regulations dictate how many off-street parking stalls are required by local governments (Strong Towns, n.d.). Minimum parking requirements continue to be a powerful mechanism that shapes cities by affecting people's homes, businesses development and how people travel around (City of Edmonton, 2021).

The City of Edmonton follows typical patterns of other cities in North America, with a car-centric built form, a high number of motorists and minimum parking requirements dating back to the 1960s (Strong Towns, 2020; City

of Edmonton, 2021). Edmonton's minimum parking requirements garnered negative attention in recent years, as businesses and religious institutions were impeded by the requirements (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.). With the go-ahead from Edmonton's City Council, the City Administration conducted an extensive review of all minimum parking requirements (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.).

On June 23, 2020, the City of Edmonton became the first major Canadian jurisdiction to eliminate minimum parking requirements and introduced Open Option Parking (City of Edmonton, 2022). The City of Edmonton received the Award for Planning Excellence in New and Emerging Planning Initiatives from the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) in 2021, highlighting the City's "robust education and public consultation effort[s]" (Canadian Institute of Planners, 2021).

3.0 Case Summary

Framing the Topic

From the beginning of this project, the City Administration recognized strong emotions are often present when discussing cars and parking. To tackle these sensitivities, the public engagement campaign had to be careful to frame the topic to facilitate an open, constructive, and curious conversation about parking (Strong Towns, 2020). The public engagement campaign relayed that removing parking minimums provided more choice and the freedom for property owners to decide how much parking they require (Salvador, 2020). The campaign also communicated that removing parking minimums doesn't mean losing parking altogether.

City Scenario Trade-offs

The public engagement process began by utilizing a trade-off concept to talk to the public about parking. This enabled the conversation to move away from a quantitative discussion of how much parking is needed and instead focused on common city elements that must be traded-off to build different city typologies (Strong Towns, 2020). The public engagement



campaign asked Edmontonians to consider the following three community characteristics influenced by parking requirements, with the understanding that only two characteristics can be achieved at the same time:

Walkable: How convenient it is to walk; providing ample parking spreads communities apart and makes environments less enjoyable for pedestrians (see Figure 2).

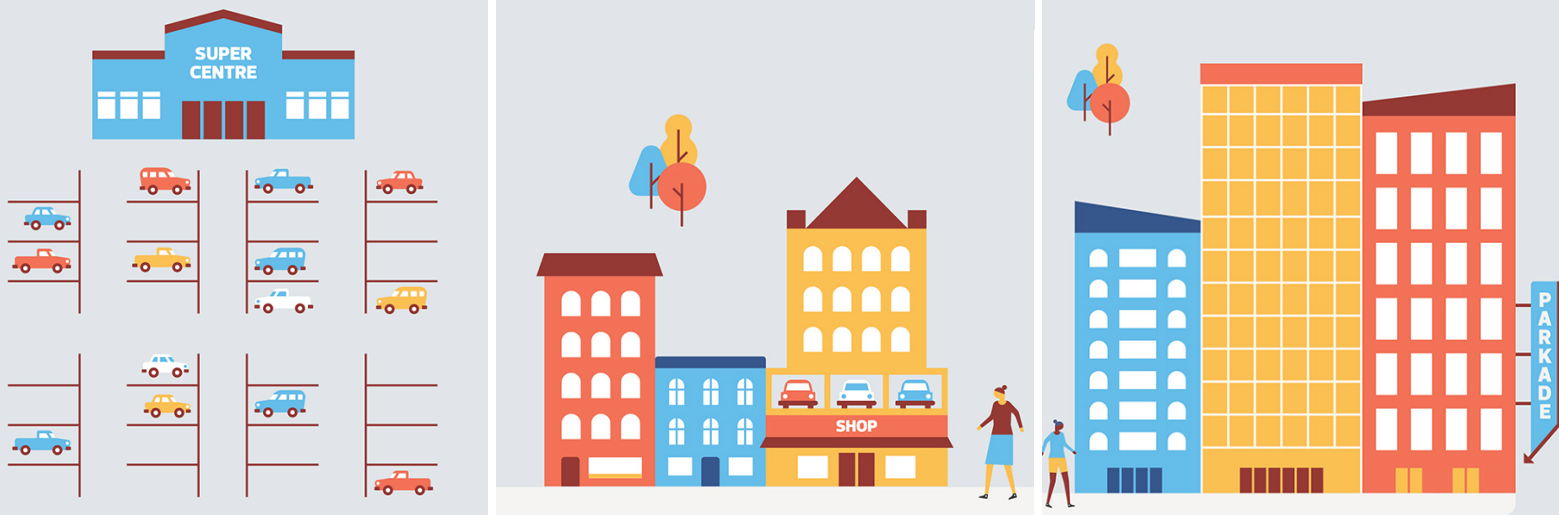


Figure 3. City scenario 1, 2 and 3 graphics

Economical: Costs associated with development; increasing from surface parking to underground parking lots can be costly expenses.

Abundant: Amount of parking provided; this impacts availability of parking (Strong Towns, 2020; Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.).

When combining two of each of these community characteristics, three city scenarios are created (see Figure 3):

Scenario 1 – Economical and Abundant: Affordable construction costs for many surface parking lots; however, large parking lots mean communities aren’t walkable.

Scenario 2 – Economical and Walkable: Low-density and compact development, some buildings have parking; however, there is not a large surplus of parking.

Scenario 3 – Abundant and Walkable: Typical downtown development, parking is underground and is walkable; however, it’s expensive to build parking (Strong Towns, 2020; Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.).

The community characteristics and three city scenarios were presented to the public through an online and random telephone survey. When asked which city scenario they preferred, respondents indicated their preference for scenarios 1 and 2, each with 39% as their first preference, while scenario 3 received 19% (Strong Towns, 2020). These results indicated respondents wanted a diversity of different city typologies. Removing parking minimums would facilitate this diversity, as some property

owners could provide more parking, while others could offer less (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.).

Crunching the Data

A detailed technical study supported the public engagement work. The technical study’s purpose was to understand parking supply and demand in Edmonton. 340 unique commercial and residential sites were chosen across the city for observation (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.). To mitigate the appearance of bias, the public was invited to submit sites for observation (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.). The technical study found only 40% of spaces surveyed were ever full (Strong Towns, 2020). The technical study “demonstrated that there was no evidence to suggest a geographic, context specific or business-related set of parking regulations for different areas of the city” and suggested it would be difficult to establish an appropriate rate for parking minimums (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d., p. 6).

Asking the Essential Question

Upon completing the baseline survey and technical study, the next step was to ask the public about minimum parking requirements. Again, the project team was mindful to avoid conversations about the quantity of parking needed and asked: How should parking for new homes and businesses be regulated (Strong Towns, 2020)? This question asks *how to* regulate rather than *how much* should be regulated (Strong Towns, 2020).



1. Minimum Parking Requirements	2. Open Option Parking	3. Maximum Parking Requirements
<p>The City determines a set number of spaces that must be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of parking spaces are provided. • Supports driving but can limit walking. • Homeowners and businesses have less choice. 	<p>Businesses and homeowners choose the amount of parking they provide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of parking spaces can be provided. • Supports driving and walking. • Homeowners and businesses have more choice. 	<p>The City sets a limit on the number of parking spaces that can be provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A restricted number of parking spaces are provided. • Supports walking but can limit driving. • Homeowners and businesses have less choice.

Figure 4. Parking requirements spectrum graphic

The project team coined Open Option Parking to convey the accuracies that removing parking minimums could achieve. Open Option Parking helped distinguish the misconception that removing parking minimums would result in no parking (Strong Towns, 2020). This option allows flexibility and empowers businesses and homeowners to choose how much parking they need. Open Option Parking was presented as a middle ground between parking minimums and parking maximums to reflect this option is not an extreme choice (see Figure 4). Survey results demonstrated Edmontonians’ preference for Open Option Parking, as 60% of respondents supported this option (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.).

Supportive Allies

The public engagement and technical study initiatives were bolstered by strong backing from advocacy groups. Advocates of the change recognized the benefits of eliminating minimum parking requirements and sought to drum up public support. Canada Backyard Housing Association advocated for this project by rallying people to speak at council, conducted news interviews to spread the word and circulated support letter templates (YEGarden Suites, 2020). To ensure people understood what parking minimums were about and dispel myths, the Canada Backyard Housing Association created and distributed infographics (see Figure 5) (Strong Towns, 2020).

The Canada Backyard Housing Association sought to address and quell fears regarding the project before it was presented at the public hearing (Strong Towns, 2020). They recognized different audiences needed to hear different rationales and arguments to support Open Option Parking (Strong Towns, 2020), while some individuals wanted to hear about how removing minimum parking requirements would cut red tape or be more efficient with tax dollars. At the same time, some were more interested in how this could produce a more walkable and healthy community (Strong Towns, 2020).



Figure 5. Canada Backyard Housing Association graphic

4.0 Outcomes

Open Option Parking was presented to the City of Edmonton's Urban Planning Committee (UPC) on May 7, 2019, and January 28, 2020 (City of Edmonton, 2022). The UPC directed City Administration to detail implementation plans for the Open Option Parking and investigate

issues related to on-street parking, barrier-free parking, and shared parking on properties (City of Edmonton, 2022). City Council unanimously approved the project at a Public Hearing on June 23, 2020, which went into effect on July 2, 2020 (City of Edmonton, 2022).

5.0 Lessons Learned



Figure 6. Parking rules graphic

Constructive Conversations

The public engagement campaign was designed to open the dialogue around parking in a constructive manner. The project team imagined asking the public how much parking they want would yield the same answer as asking how much money they want; typically, the answer is more (Stevenson & Karhut, n.d.). To avoid a quantitative argument, the project team tailored questions that facilitated productive conversations about city elements that influenced parking and received valuable answers that ultimately led to public buy-in.

Purposeful Language and Communication

The City of Edmonton's project team recognized that speaking about parking would likely result in strong and passionate opinions. The project team utilized careful language and communication styles to structure the topic neutrally. The public engagement campaign ensured that removing minimum parking requirements was not an anti-car or pro-car decision. It emphasized the individual,

choice, freedom, and empowered property owners to choose how much parking they needed. The Open Option Parking graphic was intentionally placed in the middle of the Parking Requirements Spectrum (see Figure 4) to demonstrate it was the middle of the road option rather than an extreme. Emphasis was also placed on communicating that Open Option Parking would result in gradual changes to Edmonton's built form, to counter fears that this change would result in sudden, dramatic changes in people's neighbourhoods or that the City was "taking away" parking.

Speaking to Different Perspectives

Removing parking minimum requirements in Edmonton was successful because it spoke to various stakeholders with different priorities and political concerns. The dollars and cents argument asserts removing parking minimums is a market-based solution that helps the local economy, business owners and is more efficient with tax dollars (Strong Towns, 2020). Another argument is focused on social, health and environmental concerns. This argument asserts removing minimum parking requirements will result in a healthier, more walkable community and helps combat climate change (Strong Towns, 2020). Consistent messaging around choice and freedom makes this decision about people, rather than the municipal government dictating requirements. Employing these different lenses when speaking to various stakeholders, such as city councillors, members of the public, developers and community groups, was key to establishing buy-in from a diverse group of people.

Roles of the Advocates

The project was backed by many civil service society groups, including the Canadian Home Builders Association, Commercial and Real Estate Development Association, Urban Development Institute - Edmonton Region, Canada Backyard Housing Association - YEG Garden Suites and the Infill Developers of Edmonton Association (Strong Towns, 2020). The initiative to eliminate minimum parking

requirements was something these groups could get behind, and their support motivated City Administration and Council to move the project forward. The Canada Backyard Housing Association worked to produce its own messaging campaign and spoke to the public about their concerns (YEGarden Suites, 2020). This advocacy work helped keep momentum and public support in their favour leading up to city council meetings.

6.0 Conclusion

The project was seen as a political win for City Council. It was backed by robust data and gained support from key stakeholders, including the public, developers, community organizations and industries. The effects of eliminating minimum parking requirements will gradually change the city over time. Although it may be too early to fully understand the

ramifications of this initiative, it is notable that this decision had overwhelming stakeholder buy-in from various groups. This may bode well for the potential for this change to help shape more responsible land use patterns and transportation decisions in Edmonton well into the future.

7.0 References

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Figure List

Figure 1. YEGarden Suites. (2020, January 19). *It's Time to End Parking Minimums in Edmonton* [Photograph]. Canada Backyard Housing Association. <https://www.yegardensuites.com/post/it-s-time-to-end-parking-minimums-in-edmonton>

Figure 2. Cut & Paste Design Inc. (2022). *Parking Rules for New Homes and Businesses* [Graphic]. City of Edmonton. https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/comprehensive-parking-review?utm_source=virtualaddress&utm_campaign=makingspace

Figure 3. Cut & Paste Design Inc. (2022). *Parking Rules for New Homes and Businesses* [Graphic]. City of Edmonton. https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/comprehensive-parking-review?utm_source=virtualaddress&utm_campaign=makingspace

Figure 4. Cut & Paste Design Inc. (2019). *Parking Requirements Spectrum* [Graphic]. City of Edmonton. https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/parking_requirements_spectrum.pdf?cb=1647809412

Figure 5. Salvador, A. (n.d.). *Removing Parking Minimums in YEG* [Graphic]. Canada Backyard Housing Association. <https://create.piktochart.com/output/43439911-removing-parking-minimums-in-yeg>

Figure 6. Cut & Paste Design Inc. (2022). *Parking Rules for New Homes and Businesses* [Graphic]. City of Edmonton. https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/comprehensive-parking-review?utm_source=virtualaddress&utm_campaign=makingspace