



No Place To Park

This nightmare may be coming to Los Altos

Imagine going to the library at 11 am and being unable to find a place to park. Or visiting City Hall or the new Community Center and giving up after circling the parking lot looking for an open spot. What about going downtown at 3 pm and finding the same situation. As a library lover, community center attendee or downtown shopper what would you do? While none of these is likely to happen next week or next month, changes to parking requirements in downtown coupled with increased building construction and capacity are likely to produce that result over the next few years. Add to that the visioning process which calls for turning many of the parking plazas into dining areas and other uses, and you have what many in Los Altos are calling a nightmare scenario.

How did this happen?

The City Council is due to vote on a change to parking requirements that effectively will allow a property owners who are part of the parking district (the historic core downtown of Main Street, State Street, and the numbered streets between them) to double the size of their buildings, adding offices upstairs, without providing any new parking. For those properties outside the parking district, if new parking is for a project, the developer can pay into an *in lieu* fund and gain approval. The proposed rate is less than one-half the cost of actually providing that parking spot in a garage or below ground facility. The City would need to have at least several hundred *in lieu* parking spot payments in the bank in order to pay for new parking.

Give me an example

A typical retail store on State or Main Street has 5,000 sq feet of space. Right now the property owner could add a second story with offices, doubling the size of the building, but needs to add parking for 14 cars. Since the lots are small, it is impractical to put in underground parking. So the property owner effectively cannot add more space under the existing rules. However, the proposed rules would allow that same downtown property owner to add a second story without having to add any new parking spots, nor to pay into any fund for a future parking garage. The proposed change decreased the parking requirements for the second floor from 1 space per 300 sq. ft. to 1 space per 500 sq. ft., and at the same time increased the credit for the first floor to 1 space per 285 sq. ft. Do the math, and you will see that whatever the size, there are no net requirements for adding parking spaces. If only a few

property owners did this, it would result in 25-40 additional cars. But where do those cars park if the existing parking plazas are filled? That is our question. And if more than a few downtown property owners add a second story of offices then we risk hurting the downtown merchants and surrounding neighborhoods.

How do other cities determine parking requirements?

We did a comparison of other cities and in the case of most surrounding towns (Palo Alto, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Burlingame and Los Gatos) that same property owner would need to add 14-17 parking spots versus the 14 required in Los Altos. So currently Los Altos is at the low end in terms of parking requirement compared to our neighbors. The fact that Los Altos lots are small makes onsite parking difficult, which is why many have encouraged the City to work with local downtown property owners to fund construction of a parking garage or provide an employee shuttle to offsite parking.

Why isn't someone ringing the alarm bell?

We frankly don't know. There has been zero analysis of the impact of this change on the availability of parking. There has been no discussion about limiting the number of hours someone can park at the library, City Hall or the Community Center to preserve those spots for their patrons. There has been no proposals discussed that would prevent the overflow parking from encroaching on the residential streets which surround downtown, even though many residents are already complaining about office workers parking all day on the residential streets.

Is this much ado about nothing?

We don't think so. The parking demand by businesses in Los Alto is going up, not down. An excellent case in point is Netskope, a startup that is headquartered on Third Street. The company has grown from 68 employees at the end of 2016 to 177 at the end of 2017. However, their office-just shy of 12k square feet, only has parking for 65 cars. So where do all the other cars park? Well about 10-15 double park in their off-street parking lot/parking garage, blocking handicap spots and creating a fire hazard. The rest park on residential streets and others move their cars every 2-3 hours depending upon the parking limits in the plazas/on the street.

The new parking ratios being proposed require 2-2.5 spots per 1000 sq feet of office. By comparison, Netskope, just using the cars parked onsite, needs 8 spots per 1000 sq feet and if you total all the employees they would need 14 parking spots per 1000 square feet of office to meet the parking demand onsite.

What can concerned Los Altos residents do?

This matter was supposed to be on the Council agenda in late September. After a FOLA board member made a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce on this matter, it was taken off the agenda. It will appear before the City Council at some point, probably after the election.

If this concerns you, show up at the City Council meeting when this matter is heard and let the City Council know about your concerns. You can also write each Council member. Demand City staff do an

analysis of parking requirements and parking supply. Ask that if new parking standards are adopted the City pay for mitigation measures (posted and enforced parking limits at City Hall, Community Center and library as well as a city-funded resident only parking permit program for the surrounding neighborhoods). We encourage insisting a parking structure be built first, before parking requirements are reduced.

Most in our town want a more vibrant downtown and we do too. We want a downtown that works for downtown merchants, shoppers as well as the broader community. But in order to work it cannot create a blight on the surrounding neighborhoods, discourage shoppers and diners who cannot find parking stalls, and negatively impact parking for other City functions.