

SAN LEANDRO 2050

COMMUNITY CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Re: Multi-Family Development Standards - Toward the Walkable City

Oct. 18, 2021

Dear San Leandro City Council, Planning Commission, and Community Development Department:

Residents of San Leandro dream of a truly walkable city where children, seniors, and people with disabilities can live and play safely. It does not have to be a dream: we community organizations and concerned citizens are writing to urge city staff to take immediate action to bring us closer to the walkable city.

The city is working on revising Multi-Family Development Standards, laying out the kind of communities we want to see more of in the future. But under the current draft, we are planning for continued car dependence, and that is what we will keep getting.

Car traffic kills seven people every year on average in San Leandro, seriously injures another 26, and hurts many other people as fumes and tire bits fill our air. But as long as the city is built in a shape that requires cars to get around, residents will remain tethered to their cars.

San Leandro requires all new buildings come with way too many parking spaces, even close to public transportation. When city staff collected public feedback, they found broad interest in lowering required parking near transit. Unfortunately, the draft Standards barely change parking requirements, even within a quarter mile of BART.

As the attachment details, lowering mandated parking near transit not only provides needed opportunities for lifestyles with fewer cars, but means we get more affordable and mixed-income housing. It is an essential ingredient for the walkable city.

San Leandro needs more frequent and accessible public transit. More walkable neighborhoods are what will make this transit sustainable, and are what the city has the power to create on its own.

The time is now. We urge you to plan for more housing for people and less housing for cars.

With hope,

(signed)

John Minot
San Leandro 2050

Attachment: Why Reducing Parking Requirements Near Transit Is a Key Lever

San Leandro's draft Multi-Family Development Standards plan seeks to make it more feasible to build housing in San Leandro, and the 2035 Climate Action Plan seeks to significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled. But while city staff and scientific research are unanimous in finding that off-street parking requirements obstruct both affordable housing and greener lifestyles, the draft standards make only minor changes to these requirements, and preserve the least necessary requirements - those for developments a quarter mile from major transit stops.

Right now, it is difficult to live without a car in San Leandro, and this is the direct result of a built environment that privileges car use. The only way to change our system to promote transit-oriented development is by allowing housing near transit to come with less parking.

We ask that the city amend the draft standards to reduce off-street parking in multifamily-zoned areas very close to public transit as follows:

Zones	DA, SA, and RM (all multifamily zones subject to standards)	
Distance from major transit stop	Less than 0.5 miles:	At least 0.5 miles, but less than 1 mile:
Minimum off-street parking required	No minimum	0.5 per unit
Maximum allowed	1 space per unit	1.5 per unit

Off-street parking requirements near transit hurt San Leandro by:

- 1. Increasing the cost of housing for low-income families as well as for the middle class.** Garage parking typically costs \$20-30,000 per space (or more) to build. Current RM parking requirements averaging about 2.5 spaces per unit effectively mean a building must dedicate as much floor area for cars as it does for people. Most often, as the city found in its site analysis, they mean nothing gets built at all. Cities that have reduced their parking requirements have seen **more affordable and mixed-income housing built***.
- 2. Increasing car ownership, congestion, and carbon emissions.** Free off-street parking is a subsidy to car use. Studies show after similar people move to a home with off-street parking versus one without, they are more likely to buy a car, or to buy a second car, or to use their cars more. After all, they have free storage. This increases car emissions and further clogs our streets - it even increases how many people park on the curb.
- 3. Preventing the development of a walkable city.** When half the city is devoted to parking, the parking pushes everything in the city farther apart: small businesses can't rely on foot traffic. And when seniors can no longer drive, the city suddenly becomes unlivable to them.

- 4. Perpetuating the car-ownership burden on working families.** When the built environment forces people to have a car just to live, car expenses become one of the greatest unavoidable expenses for working families, much more than any tax bill - and puts them at great financial risk when the car breaks down.

San Leandro's heavy current requirements near transit - minimum 1 space even within a quarter mile of BART! - are also contrary to best practices by all agencies seeking to promote transit-oriented development:

- In the Bay Fair BART Transit-Oriented Development district (not covered by the draft multi-family standards), Sub-Area 1 has no minimum parking and maximum 1 space per unit.
- [BART TOD guidelines](#) recommend "no minimum parking requirement" near transit, and maximum 0.5 per unit in urban neighborhoods near transit, or maximum 1 per unit in town centers.
- The state [Department of Housing and Community Development](#) recommends parking maximums near transit of 1 to 1.75, depending on bedrooms and city type, and no parking minimums.

Eliminating required parking does not mean eliminating all parking. Developers will certainly still choose to provide some amount of parking. However, they will be better able to plan for the significant chunk of people who are happy to live car-free.

The city's Climate Action Plan, passed unanimously in July 2021, said explicitly that eliminating off-street parking requirements was a key strategy toward promoting a range of transportation options in the city of 2035. If we practice what we preach, we will take this first, moderate step toward reducing emissions and promoting affordable housing in San Leandro.

* Chart on affordable homes (blue) and density-bonus homes (red) produced in San Diego. In 2019, San Diego strengthened its density bonus program and removed minimum parking requirements for all residential developments within transit priority areas. Source: [Circulate San Diego](#)

