

Article 24 – Zoning Petition –Municipal Parking (MP) District Amendments Options for Regulating Downtown Parking

After nearly 30 years of requiring no parking at all for residential uses in the MP District, Article 24 proposes to simply revert to full parking requirements for these uses, and to remove the ability of permit-granting bodies to modify parking requirements in that district. Article 24 offers no other ways to deal with downtown parking needs.

There is a wide range of ‘best practices’ that should be considered in any new zoning regulations governing downtown or village center parking, including the following:

- **Different (Lower) Parking Requirements Than in Outlying Districts** – Many Massachusetts communities require lower (or no) parking for downtown residential uses. The trend is increasingly to require no parking for new development. Amherst’s Municipal Parking (MP) District is ahead of the curve. Centers are better used for buildings, activity, and pedestrian space, with centralized parking sited a convenient walking distance from most destinations, and a strong emphasis on walking and reliance on public transit. Additionally, parking is very expensive, and mandating parking discourages needed new growth. Best practices recommendations also include establishing maximum limits for new parking, to keep downtown areas from being covered with pavement—displacing buildings, pedestrian spaces, and green space. Article 24 would discourage new growth, and encourage more pavement when development happened.
- **Fees-In-Lieu** – Many communities allow or require developers to pay a fee-in-lieu of direct construction of parking spaces. The fees go into a local fund that supports the creation and maintenance of public parking. Northampton has such a requirement. Fees are often nominal, and do not represent the full cost of building a new parking space—this restraint balances the competing public interests of encouraging new development on the one hand, and the provision of resources to sustain public parking on the other. Some communities require the payment of an annual (smaller) fee, rather than a one-time parking fee. Article 24 offers no such flexibility.
- **Shared or Leased Parking** – Many communities’ bylaws, including Amherst’s, recognize that parking is often shared—i.e., that the same parking is used by different constituents during different times of the day or night—and that private parking can be leased. Amherst’s regulations governing these options are 17 years old, and could use some updating. Article 24 proposes no improvements to these regulations. It just imposes punitive new parking requirements.
- **Alternative Transportation** – Shared-car or bicycle use can be recognized in parking regulations as a way of displacing use of private automobiles. Zipcar representatives assert that

for every shared-car they put on a site, as many as 20 private cars are taken off the road. Some acknowledgement of the effect of alternative transportation needs to be incorporated into parking requirements. Article 24 has no such provisions.

- **Off-Site Parking** – Like many other communities, Amherst’s parking regulations allow proposed new uses to ‘count’ off-site parking that is close to (within 800 feet of) the site of a new building or use, if the applicant can demonstrate that they have a right to use the parking and that it will be available when needed. Additionally, under Section 7.9, a permitting body can modify and reduce parking requirements if, for instance, there is adjacent on-street or off-street public metered parking that can help meet the needs of a project. Article 24 seeks to amend Section 7.91 so that no modification of parking requirements would be possible in the MP District.
- **Design Criteria** – Amherst’s parking regulations contain basic design standards regulations governing the layout, paving, lighting, and screening of parking lots or structures, but they do not yet address many of the urban design issues specific to parking lots or facilities in downtowns or other centers. Article 24 offers no such improvements.

Article 24 tries to address the complex parking needs of downtown Amherst with narrowly-focused amendments that seek to make the regulations less flexible. This is the opposite of what is needed. Downtown Amherst has some of the urban characteristics of a regional economic center, but it serves a much wider region that is mostly rural. It has an excellent public transit system, but the circle of communities in which people who work, go to school, shop, or obtain services in Amherst extends out well beyond the reach of any public transit system. Many people travelling to downtown Amherst, including the thousands of visitors Amherst attracts in every season of the year, have no choice but to travel to the downtown by car. Those users of downtown Amherst need convenient, reliably available public parking.

In contrast, downtown residents for the most part use private parking, on-street permit spaces, and leased spaces. They do not compete in meaningful ways for metered public parking spaces. For people living in Amherst’s downtown and village centers, it makes sense for parking regulations governing their residential uses to parallel those used in more urban settings. Center residents require fewer cars—observed trends in declining car ownership and changing household demographics strongly support this conclusion.

Article 24 has it exactly backwards. Its solution to perceived future problems of inadequate downtown public parking supply is to mandate that new downtown residential uses provide parking. If provided, that parking would eat up available land area more appropriate for buildings and pedestrian space, and that parking would be private, unavailable to the majority of non-residential downtown users who need parking most. By ignoring the complexities of downtown parking, Article 24 provides the wrong solution to the wrong problem.

Selected Zoning Parking Requirements for Multi-Family Residential Uses in Mixed-use Centers in Massachusetts

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Parking Requirement</u>
Amherst	No parking required in Municipal Parking District; 2 spaces/unit elsewhere
Northampton	1 space/500 sq. ft. of GFA (per unit) or 1,000 sq. ft. GFA for elderly/affordable/disabled housing, up to a maximum of 1 space/dwelling unit.
Amesbury	1.5 spaces/unit
Attleboro	1 space/unit (downtown)
Belchertown	2 spaces/unit, plus 1 visitor space for every 10 spaces of required parking
Boston	1 space/unit
Boylston	1 space/1 bdrm unit; 2 spaces/2+ bdrm units; or as determined by the Planning Bd
Cambridge	1 space/unit
Chelsea	1.5/unit, plus 0.5 spaces for each bdrm over two
Chicopee	1.5 spaces/unit, plus 1 guest space for every 10 units in multi-family dwellings four or more units
Easthampton	1 space/unit, plus 1 guest space for every 10 units
Fairhaven	1 space/studio or 1 bdrm unit; 2 spaces/2+ bdrm units
Gloucester	1 space/unit
Great Barrington	2 spaces/units; for mixed uses, the least restrictive requirements shall apply
Greenfield	2 spaces/unit
Holyoke	2 spaces/unit up to 50 units; 1.5 spaces/unit for every unit over 50
Lawrence	1 space/units for studios or 1 bdrm units; 2 spaces/unit for larger units
Lowell	0.75 spaces/unit
Marblehead	2 spaces/unit; 0.5 spaces/units for elderly housing
Newburyport	2 spaces/unit for first two units, then 1.5 spaces/unit for all subsequent units
Newton	2 spaces/unit (default); 1.5 spaces/unit with SP; 1 space/unit for affordable
Pittsfield	1.5 spaces/unit for multi-unit residential uses
Quincy	1.5 spaces/unit for residential uses
Saugus	2 spaces/unit; 1 space/3 units for elderly housing
Shrewsbury	1.5 spaces/unit, plus as needed for visitors and employees; 1 spaces/2 units for elderly housing
Somerville	1 space/unit for studios or live-work uses; 1.5 spaces/1—2 bdrm units; 2 spaces/3+ bdrm units; plus 1 space/6 units for visitors or service
South Hadley	1 space/unit, but at the discretion of the Planning Board may be increased to 1.5 spaces/unit for units with 2 or more bedrooms
Springfield	1 space/unit for one bedroom units in multi-family dwellings; 1.5 spaced/units for units of 2 bedrooms or more in multi-family dwellings
Sunderland	2 spaces/dwelling unit
Ware	1.5 spaces/unit, plus one space for every 7 units for visitors
Wellesley	1 space/unit/property for residential buildings containing 3-19 units 1.5 spaces/unit/property for buildings containing 20 or more units
West Springfield	2 spaces/unit
Wilbraham	1.5 spaces/unit
Williamstown	1 space per bedroom, to a maximum of 3 spaces per dwelling unit
Worcester	2 spaces/unit