

City of Kingston Zoning Working Group



June 20, 2025

To: Alderwoman Sara Pasti

CC: Alderwoman Teryl Mickens, John Schultheis, City Engineer

From: Zoning Working Group

Subject: Response to Proposal Regarding Off-Street Parking Standards in T3N Transect, City of Kingston Form-Based Code

Dear Alderwoman Pasti,

Thank you for your detailed proposal requesting the Zoning Working Group's consideration of amendments to the Form-Based Code relating to off-street parking standards, specifically in the T3N Transect.

We agree with you that properties in this Transect are generally outside of Kingston's urban core and do not have the same level of commercial amenities as higher-density neighborhoods in T4 or T5 Transects. We also agree that these areas are often not served by adequate levels of infrastructure, especially sidewalk access. We recognize the practical concerns you have raised and appreciate the thoughtful framework you offered for evaluating context-sensitive parking needs.

After thorough discussion, the Zoning Working Group respectfully recommends against reinstating minimum parking requirements. We have significant concerns that reinstating minimums—regardless of location—would be a step backward for Kingston's planning goals.

Our Main Concerns

1. Long-Term Impacts on the Built Environment

Parking minimums shape the form and function of development. Once imposed, they constrain land use options for decades by reducing density, increasing impervious surfaces, and undermining walkability. Reinstating parking mandates—even in select transects—risks reinforcing car-centric development in precisely the places where the City hopes to encourage walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

2. Conflict with National and Local Planning Best Practices

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As confirmed in current planning literature, removing parking minimums:

- Lowers housing production costs,
- Encourages infill development,
- Supports active transportation,
- Creates more adaptable and affordable building types.

The Kingston Form-Based Code is rooted in these principles. Reinstating parking minimums contradicts the planning rationale behind the Code and undercuts Kingston's leadership among peer cities adopting progressive zoning reform, including recent awards from the Congress for New Urbanism and Smart Growth America.

3. Transit and Infrastructure Should Be the Focus

As stated earlier, we share your concerns about non-automobile accessibility in lower-density neighborhoods. However, we believe the solution lies not in reinstating parking minimums, but in continuing to invest in sidewalks, pedestrian infrastructure, and transit access. This approach aligns with the City's long-term vision and avoids locking in car dependency through zoning.

4. Policy Consistency Across Transects

A patchwork of parking requirements across different transects risks undermining the clarity and integrity of the Form-Based Code. To be effective and transformative, the code must offer consistent signals to both developers and the public across neighborhoods. While one approach would be to give the Planning Board greater discretion over minimum parking requirements on a project-by-project basis, we fear this will introduce uncertainty in the code and undercut housing creation goals.

On the Definition of "Walkable Neighborhood"

We appreciate the invitation to revisit the definition of "walkable neighborhood." While a neighborhood's walkability must be informed by broader context—including access to nearby retail, services, and transit—this should not necessarily be used as a justification for imposing parking minimums and new car infrastructure. Rather, it should guide how we prioritize investments in connectivity and amenities.

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The term “walkable” implies a desired future condition that the Form-Based Code is meant to help create—not merely a description of what exists today. Applying minimum parking requirements to areas lacking current walkability may only reinforce the barriers to creating it.

Recommendation

For the reasons above, we respectfully oppose the proposal to reinstate parking minimums in the T3 transects. We do, however, support the City continuing to evaluate the adequacy of infrastructure and transit access in outlying neighborhoods—and to plan accordingly.

As part of our ongoing work, the Zoning Working Group is currently reviewing the parking policy used in Burlington, Vermont, which employs *maximum* parking limits that vary by neighborhood context. If our conclusion is relevant to this discussion, we will follow up with you.

We remain committed to working with you, the Common Council, and the Planning Board to align zoning policy with the City’s broader housing and mobility goals.

Sincerely,

Kingston Zoning Working Group

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Ines Yupanqui, Public Member

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