

Report of the Transportation Committee on the Parking Element Resolution

The draft resolution includes 5 "action items" that suggest changes to the draft Parking Element component of the new Arlington Master Transportation Plan plus a request that the County Board defer for one month to allow for a more careful review of the most recent draft. Such a delay would be minor relative to the expected planning horizon of the document of up to 10 to 20 years and the time that might have to be spent working through issues created by specific wording or action items in the document.

The following provides some of the discussion comments raised by Transportation Committee members on each of the items (comments were made on both sides and discussion was often vigorous).

1. Clarify and limit the scope of a proposed action item to encourage voluntary reduction of residential driveway area to only situations and neighborhoods in which there is ample, safe on-street parking available to accommodate a shift of cars to the roadway. Such encouragement of voluntary citizen action should not occur on streets where it would result in less safety, convenience or negative changes in neighborhood character;
Background: The language in question is an "action item" for a policy of promoting on-street parking: "Encourage the removal of off-street impermeable-surface parking in excess of zoning requirements in residential areas where on-street parking is expected to be undersubscribed."

Comments by TC members:

- The two main purposes of the policy are to slow traffic and reduce impervious surfaces.
- It is not intended to apply to most R-5 or R-6 type zones, but rather to R-12 and R-20 zones, where the street can reasonably absorb nearly all needed parking and where impervious surfaces may be extensive.
- The broad language could lead to inappropriate use by some future staff person unfamiliar with the current understanding of limited applicability. For example, a driveway to a rear garage could be considered as parking area in excess of required parking.
- The policy would be discriminatory because it would not affect some residential properties with much higher percentages of impermeable pavement and buildings.
- On-street parking is not necessarily safer because cars parked on the street are more likely to be hit and their drivers are at more risk getting in and out of the car.
- Cars parked on the street are more likely to get broken into than those parked in the owner's driveway (comment from an Arlington police office while investigating a car break-in in front of the house).
- Pedestrians stepping out from between cars can't be seen and are at more risk.
- There was concern about one staff comment that enforcement might be via applications for other permits. The broad language needs to be considered in the context of the recent controversy over a DES policy to encourage streets with curb, gutter and sidewalks by denying any repaving of streets without them.

2. Make clear that parking reductions in the major transportation corridors through the site plan process should be granted only in exchange for community benefits that are of equivalent value and are related to transportation infrastructure. To this end the element should (a) recognize that most site plan zoning categories in use in the transportation corridors already contain significant parking reductions that reflect access to transit (e.g. compare site plan parking requirements with by-right C-3 parking requirements) (b) require that reductions be done on a case by case basis taking into account the parking needs of the building and adjacent area and transit availability, and (c) should also recognize that increased use of transit in these corridors has a price (e.g. additional bus purchases to handle increased loads);

Comments by TC members:

- While non-transportation community benefits may be desirable, further reducing parking requirements could lead to parking spillover into the neighborhoods and similar problems.
- Builder promises of Transportation Demand Management contributions are not being enforced so that the intended reduction in parking demand may not materialize.

3. Provide clear advance notice of variable pricing rates in effect to persons using applicable spaces;

Background:

Policy: Utilize parking meter pricing strategies that vary by hour and location to better match parking availability and demand. Implement newer technologies such as multi - space meters and

credit card and cell phone payment to enhance parking options. The action item language is: " Use pricing and time restrictions, when appropriate, to allocate the duration of curb side uses in a manner tailored to the extent of demand. When determining appropriateness, consult with local businesses and residents. Curb usage should be free when the demand for the curb is lower than the supply; time restrictions should be used to balance curb usage between various users in low demand areas; curb usage should be prioritized and appropriate fees charged in high - demand areas."

Comments by TC members (on back):

- Variable pricing is still relatively new and rare and may be confusing and off-putting for visitors and residents who are only occasional users.
- While variable pricing changes may currently be relatively rare, in time it may be feasible and cost effective to implement more rapid meter price adjustments. (and the potential for "get poor Charlie off the MTA situations")

4. As part of the Site Plan or Use Permit Process consider the impact of new commercial and residential buildings on nearby low density residential neighborhood parking. Develop and implement measures to address the projected impact on neighborhood parking, such as expanded zoned parking or change in hours of existing zoned parking. Ensure that implementation of the residential zoned parking is prioritized by County staff such that it can be implemented very speedily after the discovery of any new overspill parking locations;

Background: Policy 6 states: "Ensure that minimum parking needs are met and excessive parking is not built. Divert resources saved by reducing excess off - street parking to other community benefits."

Comments by TC members:

- Spillover parking when parking demand exceeds the amount provided is a concern in many neighborhoods.

5. Create a new category of parking spaces that would be available both to handicapped persons and also to seniors and other designated categories of citizens. The intent of this recommendation is not to reduce parking spaces for the handicapped required under ADA provisions, but to increase the number of spaces available both to the handicapped and to other persons with physical limitations who do not meet the handicapped test. Seniors might be defined as those over 70, and other qualified persons might include women who are pregnant and parents with small children. Such spaces might be located in a section of a parking garage near an elevator, and might be subject to certain time and day limitations, such as available only weekdays before 6 p.m.;

Comments by TC members:

- There may be a need for a new category of parking for certain categories of people who need special consideration for parking access, but don't qualify for handicapped parking. Examples include seniors and mothers with small children, but other categories could be identified.

6. Request a minimum of a one-month deferral prior to adoption by the County Board due to the large number changes recommended by staff subsequent to the issuance of the publicly advertised version which have not been widely disseminated where they could be adequately considered by members of the public who may wish to comment.

Comments by TC members:

- Because the Parking Element has gone through many versions since the release of the advertised version, the public, community groups and even the County Board have not had an adequate opportunity to review a complete version.
- Deferral is unnecessary because the staff-proposed changes are easy to understand and uncontroversial.
- It can be difficult to determine whether specific concerns were addressed in the new drafts.
- On some occasions, the latest draft was provided to the Transportation or Planning Commission with insufficient time for an adequate review by the commissions and members of the public who attended these meetings.