

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Parking: A Matter of Exceptions

The City of Fremont Municipal Code establishes vehicle parking regulations "... to provide for the general welfare and convenience of the public by providing for suitable off-street vehicular parking facilities ... [in order] ... to ensure the safe movement of traffic on the public streets ... [and] protect adjacent residential and institutional uses from the adverse impacts of vehicular traffic and parking congestion ..."

It is clear that the goal of the regulations is to place all parking for residential, commercial, and industrial developments on the development properties and not on the public streets.

Keeping parking off the streets has many benefits. It provides an open buffer zone for bicycle traffic, gives a clear view of sidewalks for better pedestrian safety, and provides space for motorists to pull over when emergency vehicles approach. It also allows proper street cleaning, which helps reduce contamination of storm water runoff into the Bay.

Exceptions Are Problems

To achieve these goals in residential areas, the parking codes specify the number of off-street parking spaces required for residents and their guests. As with any rules or requirements, there are also exceptions, and some of the exceptions can cause problems.

For example, all parking in multi-family residential developments is required to be on the development site, but an exception in the codes allows a developer to shift the guest parking onto the street if there is adequate room. This situation came before the Fremont City Council recently when a developer asked for an exemption to move over half of the required guest parking onto the street, rather than provide room on the site. After public comments opposing the exemption, and discussion among the council and staff, the developer was granted the exemption with Mayor Harrison, Councilmember Chan, and Councilmember Jones voting in favor of it, and Vice Mayor Lei and Councilmember Bacon voting against it.

Another example is that standard parking spaces are a minimum of 9 feet wide and 19 feet long, but the codes allow a developer to substitute compact size parking spaces, which are only 8 feet wide and 16 feet long, for up to 35 percent of the required spaces. Although the compact spaces have to be marked, there is little or no enforcement, which means someone can park a full-size SUV in a compact space -- with a resulting overhang that effectively blocks adjacent spaces. This problem is especially serious in large apartment and townhouse complexes, where the required number of parking spaces is already at a minimum, and parking is scarce.

Some of the biggest parking exceptions are tied to some of the biggest projects. All multi-family developments have minimum requirements for parking based on the number of bedrooms in each unit, but those within a transit oriented development (TOD) area are also restricted to a maximum amount of parking -- no matter how many bedrooms are in each unit. For example, in the proposed 670-unit Walnut Residences apartment project at Walnut and

Guardino, the city will not allow the developer to provide more than 1.75 parking spaces per unit, even though almost half of the units will have two or three bedrooms with the potential for multiple adult occupants sharing each unit. All additional vehicles will have to be parked on the surrounding neighborhood streets, which are already packed with overflow cars from the Fremont BART station and other nearby multi-family housing complexes.

The State Makes it Worse

The State of California recently passed a bill to further restrict the amount of off-street parking in residential developments that have some form of affordable housing. As an incentive to developers, AB744 prohibits a city from requiring more than 0.5 parking spaces per bedroom for residents and guests combined in developments that meet certain conditions of affordability and are within a half mile of some sort of major transit stop. The transit stop can be a BART station, a train station, a ferry terminal, or just the intersection of two major bus routes.

Proponents of the bill argue that people who need affordable housing drive less, and the cost of providing off-street parking for them is an unreasonable burden on developers. Critics counter that vehicle ownership is still both desirable and needed at all income levels, and the benefits of providing off-street parking far outweigh the costs.

CENTERVILLE JUNCTION

The Planning Commission hearing for Centerville Junction has been postponed again. It is now tentatively set for Thursday, May 26th.

ShapeOurFremont.com