



DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

City Planning Commission

Date: October 27, 2016
Time: After 8:30 A.M.*
Place: Van Nuys City Hall
Council Chamber, 2nd Floor
14410 Sylvan Street
Van Nuys, CA 91401

Case No.: N/A
CEQA No.: N/A
Plan Area: Citywide
Certified NC: All
GPLU: All
Zones: All
Public Hearing: N/A
Appeal Status: N/A
Expiration Date: N/A

PROPOSAL: Approval of an Advisory Notice to Applicants as directed by the City Planning Commission for applicants of discretionary projects that include above-grade parking.

The attached Advisory Notice is not a new policy, guideline, or plan; rather it is an informational document for the purpose of calling attention to existing adopted goals, objectives, policies, and programs in the City's General Plan that address the design of above-grade parking. The Notice includes standard project conditions and project design features commonly applied to such projects that could improve the project's pedestrian orientation.

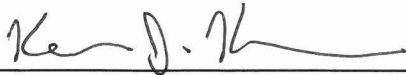
- REQUESTED ACTION:**
1. **Endorse** the Advisory Notice to Applicants related to Above-grade Parking, attached as Exhibit A;
 2. **Instruct** the Department of City Planning to initiate updates to the Downtown Design Guide and Citywide Design Guide to address the above topics, as outlined in the Advisory Notice.
 3. **Direct** staff to study the feasibility of future Zoning Code amendments regulating above-grade parking and general parking requirements.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. **Endorse** the Advisory Notice to Applicants related to Above-grade Parking attached as Exhibit A;
2. **Instruct** the Department of City Planning to initiate updates to the Downtown Design Guide and Citywide Design Guide to address the above topic as outlined in the Advisory Notice.

3. **Direct** staff to study the feasibility of future Zoning Code amendments regulating above-grade parking and general parking requirements.

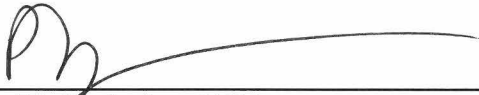
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Recommendation Report

- Summary
- Background
- Discussion
- Potential Future Actions
- Conclusion

Exhibits:

- Exhibit A – Advisory Notice to Applicants related to Above-Grade Parking

SUMMARY

The Proposed Advisory Notice serves to advise applicants of discretionary land use requests of the Commission's concerns with respect to the potential impact above-grade parking can have on the quality of the public realm and the pedestrian environment. Project design alternatives to visible above-grade parking have been identified in the Advisory Notice. If integrated into project design, these measures can lessen the potential impacts of the above-grade parking by enhancing the pedestrian experience, reducing visual impacts and improving the vitality and livability of neighborhoods.

Many of the recommended approaches have previously been proposed by staff in project review and have been presented to the City Planning Commission. This Advisory Notice simply articulates the approaches and standard practices applied by the Department of City Planning, which, if integrated into project design early on, will implement adopted policies that aim to foster a pedestrian friendly environment and enhance the character and quality of neighborhoods.

Future modifications to City regulations have also been identified in this Staff Report for the consideration of the City Planning Commission. Further developing these identified regulatory strategies would help ensure high quality design of buildings.

BACKGROUND

The development of this Advisory Notice grew out of the need to establish further policy direction regarding the design of above-grade parking and buildings with podium parking.

The City's guiding policy document, the General Plan Framework Element, identifies the City's intent to encourage well-designed buildings that contribute to a safe, secure, and attractive public realm. The Framework Element also recognizes that individual development projects are the "building blocks" of great streets and neighborhoods. Numerous City policies focus on ground-level design features of buildings and regulate how buildings meet the sidewalk and provide pedestrian-scale design and activate the street. These policies regulate and discourage visible ground-level parking but generally do not address parking above the ground floor.

Staff recommends that the City Planning Commission endorse the proposed Advisory Notice. In addition, Department staff has also identified recommended future follow-up actions that will provide further guidance on the design of above-grade and podium parking. The follow-up actions include an update of existing design guidelines, in the near term, and, in the longer term, exploring additional regulations for that could be incorporated into the re:codeLA project, the update to the City's Zoning Code. Those future actions are described in greater detail below.

DISCUSSION

A. Existing Adopted Regulations and Guidelines Related to Above Grade Parking

There have been regulations, policies and design guidelines developed which address visible ground floor parking. However, most of the existing tools are geographically specific and were not designed for citywide use. Furthermore, most tools were not designed to regulate parking above the ground floor.

Floor Area Calculations

Citywide, floor area dedicated to parking is not counted against allowable floor area. This regulation is intended to maximize habitable area in new development but has the unintended consequence of incentivizing podium-style development with above ground parking that is not lined with habitable space and is visible from the street and nearby buildings.

As a precedent, the Council recently adopted a new zone, the Hybrid Industrial Zone, which includes an FAR incentive for underground parking. In the Hybrid Industrial zone, development may exceed a baseline 3:1 FAR up to a maximum of 4.5:1 if a site additionally houses all parking underground and/or screens it at ground level. This provision minimizes the impacts that parking requirements could have on building design, bulk and massing.

Parking Design Guidelines

The Residential Citywide Design Guide and Commercial Citywide Design Guide include soft language regarding wrapping ground floor parking areas with active uses or habitable spaces or providing a visual screen or landscaped buffer between the sidewalk and parking areas. However, there is no discussion related to parking above the ground floor. The Downtown Design Guidelines include additional requirements stating that no parking shall be visible on the ground floor of any street-facing building façade, that parking above the ground floor should be lined with habitable space, and that when above ground parking cannot be lined with habitable space, revealed above-grade parking must be limited to a maximum of three levels above grade.

Parking Reductions

Parking reductions which limit some need of above-grade parking are found throughout various adopted plans and ordinances. The Vermont/Western Transit Oriented District Specific Plan (SNAP) and Crenshaw Corridor Specific Plan offer parking reductions based on proximity to transit. The Bicycle Parking Ordinance allows bicycle parking to substitute for up to 30% of required automobile parking. The recently adopted Hybrid Industrial Live/Work Zone allows for parking reductions when car share parking spaces are provided on-site.

B. Issues

Concerns related to above-grade parking are outlined below.

Exposed Above Grade Parking Does Not Contribute to the Safety and Vitality of Pedestrian Environments

Buildings designed with residential or commercial uses housed above exposed multi-level parking podiums separate habitable space from the street. The lack of habitable, transparent space on all levels of a building results in fewer “eyes” on the street. Reducing “eyes” on the street does not contribute to the safety, economic vitality, and the quality of the urban realm.

Additionally, above ground and podium-style parking can at times be characterized by unarticulated facades which are perceived by the pedestrian as a looming mass. The overbearing massing and scale of above-grade parking can dehumanize the urban environment, creating uninviting pedestrian environments.

Podium Parking May be Incompatible with Adjacent Existing Buildings

New buildings constructed with exposed poorly designed parking podium levels can create issues of compatibility with adjacent existing buildings and can place views from neighboring uses directly into unattractive parking levels. Additionally, the light from car headlights and noise from turning movements can impact neighboring uses.

Furthermore, by encouraging flat level parking podiums with adequate ceiling heights, parking levels can be more easily wrapped with habitable uses and potentially be repurposed to other uses.

POTENTIAL FUTURE ACTIONS

Additional future modifications to City regulations and guidance documents have been identified as means to encourage alternatives to above-grade parking and improve the quality of design of buildings when above-grade parking is included. These may be addressed in updates to the Zoning Code, updates to Community Plans, and updates to the Citywide and Downtown Design Guidelines. Below is an example of potential language for the two design guides followed by a list of regulatory considerations that could be explored through updates of the Zoning Code, Community Plans, Specific Plans and other efforts of the Planning Department.

A. Near Term Updates

The Department recommends that updates be explored to the Citywide and Downtown Design guide to include the following suggested language for review of above-grade parking:

Updates to Citywide Design Guide

Include the following language:

1. "Line parking, loading or circulation located above the ground floor with habitable space along all street frontages, when feasible, and integrate parking levels into the design of the building façade."
2. "Where parking above the ground floor that is not lined is included, reveal no more than a single level where the building fronts a public street."

Update to Downtown Design Guide

Amend the following language of Section 5.A and update Figure 5-1:

1. Parking required for a project shall be integrated into the project it serves. Public parking may be either a freestanding structure or integrated into a project, provided it is clearly signed as public parking.
2. Except for the minimum ground-level frontage required for access to parking and loading, no parking or loading shall be visible on the ground floor of any building façade that faces a street.
3. ~~Parking, loading or circulation located above the ground floor shall be 1) lined by habitable floor area along all street frontages or, 2) if the project sponsor demonstrates that it is not feasible to line the parking with habitable space above the ground floor, integrated into the design of the building façade.~~ Generally, parking podiums are discouraged in Downtown. All above-ground parking shall be integrated into the design of the building façade so that it is not visible from the street. The parking levels must be enclosed by the curtain wall ("skinned") or, if permitted by DCP staff, by other enhanced materials ("screened") to minimize the appearance of the parking level.

4. ~~Where parking above the ground floor that is not lined with habitable space is permitted, a maximum of three parking levels fronting on a public street shall be allowed above the ground floor, provided they are integrated into the design of the building façade and at least one habitable floor is provided directly above the visible parking levels. A maximum of one above-grade parking level may be visible from the street. All other above-grade parking must be lined with habitable Floor Area (i.e. retail, office, or residential use as defined by the Municipal Code) and enclosed with curtain wall. The habitable space must be a minimum of 18' in depth along all street frontages, and must be accessible from an internal corridor that is separate and enclosed from the parking area. If natural ventilation is required for the parking level, up to one-third of the lined parking level may be open to the exterior provided it is integrated into the building façade.~~
5. Drive-through aisles for fast food or similar use are not permitted.

B. Long Term – Future Regulatory Options

The Department is currently updating the City's Zoning Code through the re:codeLA project. As a part of that effort, some or all of the following strategies related to parking requirements, placement, and design could be included in the City's future Zoning Code.

Disincentives for Above-grade Parking

1. Consider the inclusion of the floor area of above-grade parking towards overall allowable FAR.

Incentives for Alternatives to Above-grade Parking

2. Consider incentives, such as a floor area bonus, for the construction of below grade parking.
3. Consider incentives for free-standing parking structures on large sites with multiple buildings as an alternative to above-grade parking that are publically accessible and operated as shared use parking facilities.

Design Requirements to Reduce Negative Impacts of Above-grade Parking

4. Consider translating design guidelines into zoning standards in Downtown such that no parking may be visible from "primary" streets. Above-grade parking must be wrapped with habitable uses. On secondary streets, only a single level of screened parking may be visible.
5. Consider requiring adaptable design for future change of use. Parking levels must be flat and must be built with Residential/Commercial floor to floor heights so they be easily lined with and/or converted to habitable uses.

General Strategies to Reduce Required Parking to Lessen the Need for Above-grade Parking

6. Consider the reduction or elimination of parking requirements in the most transit served areas of the City, particularly transit station areas in Downtown.
7. Consider the elimination of parking requirements for certain uses, such as small, neighborhood serving commercial uses with storefronts of 1500 or 2000 square feet.

8. Consider allowing for unbundled or shared parking where spaces can be sold or leased separately from use.
9. Consider parking reductions for providing bike share stations, car share, electric car charging stations, etc.
10. Consider standard parking ratios across broad categories (e.g. residential, commercial) which will eliminate conflicts with change of use. This may insure that uses are more interchangeable and will not encourage developers to over-park in anticipation of unknown changes of use in the future.
11. Consider the elimination of parking requirements triggers for change of use.
12. Consider the introduction of Parking Maximums.

CONCLUSION

The City Planning Commission has expressed concern about the potential effects of above-grade parking on the built environment and has asked staff to draft the subject Advisory Notice to provide direct guidance on how to evaluate projects with above-grade parking. Staff recommends that the Commission endorse this proposed Advisory Notice as an early notice to property owners and developers so as to make them aware of the policy considerations from the earliest stages of a project, providing useful, upfront guidance that can help address these key issues while providing greater clarity for applicants.

Staff has also proposed some near and long term follow-up actions to provide further regulations for projects that have above-grade parking. Those actions include updating adopted Citywide and Downtown design guidelines and longer term efforts to provide additional regulations through amendments to the Zoning Code and Community Plans Updates, particularly the ongoing update of the Downtown Community Plans.

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CITY PLANNING**

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EXHIBIT A
[DRAFT] ADVISORY NOTICE RELATIVE TO ABOVE-GRADE PARKING

TO: APPLICANTS FOR PROJECT THAT INCLUDE ABOVE-GRADE PARKING

FROM: THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

EFFECTIVE DATE: [TO BE DETERMINED]

APPLICABILITY AND INTENT OF THIS NOTICE

This notice serves to advise applicants of discretionary land use requests of the Commission's concerns with respect to the potential impact above-grade parking can have on the quality of the public realm and the pedestrian environment. Project design alternatives to visible above-grade parking have been identified below. If integrated into project design, these measures can help enhance the pedestrian experience and livability of neighborhoods and lessen the potential impacts of above-grade parking.

PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES TO REDUCE IMPACT OF ABOVE-GRADE PARKING

Discretionary projects will need to consider the following parking design features to enhance pedestrian orientation, to reduce the visual impacts of above grade parking:

1. When feasible, place required parking below grade;
2. When parking is provided above grade, consider the following design features:
 - a. line above-grade parking with habitable uses wherever feasible,
 - b. integrate parking levels into the building design, and/or
 - c. otherwise screen completely with architectural features;
3. Where feasible, design parking levels to complement the rest of the building with flat levels and standard ceiling heights which can increase flexibility of use over time
4. Where feasible, on larger sites with multiple buildings, provide parking in a shared stand-alone parking structure rather than embedded within multiple buildings;

Discretionary projects will need to consider general strategies to reduce required parking to lessen the need for above-grade parking:

5. Where possible, take advantage of parking reductions available in the Los Angeles Municipal Code to alleviate the need for additional parking levels;

If integrated into project design, the above measures can help enhance the pedestrian experience and livability of neighborhoods and lessen the potential impacts of above-grade parking.

EXISTING ADOPTED POLICIES

The City's General Plan contains policies addressing urban design and the affect poorly designed buildings dominated by parking and vehicular access can have on the public realm and the pedestrian experience. Below is a selection of polices that directly relate to above-grade parking design and will be implemented with this Advisory Notice:

General Plan Framework Element

Objective 5.5: Enhance the livability of all neighborhoods by upgrading the quality of development and improving the quality of the public realm.

Policy 5.5.3: Formulate and adopt building and site design standards and guidelines to raise the quality of design Citywide.

Mobility Plan 2035

Policy 2.3: Recognize walking as a component of every trip, and ensure high-quality pedestrian access in all site planning and public right-of-way modifications to provide a safe and comfortable walking environment.

Walkability Checklist

Locate parking behind buildings rather than directly exposed to the adjacent major street.

Incorporate architectural features on parking structure facades that respond to the neighborhood context and that contribute to "placemaking".

Use architectural features to provide continuity at the street where openings occur due to driveways or other breaks in the sidewalk and building wall.

BACKGROUND

The development of this Advisory Notice grew out of the need to establish further policy direction regarding the design of above-grade parking and buildings with podium parking.

The City's guiding policy document, the General Plan Framework Element, identifies the City's intent to encourage well-designed buildings that contribute to a safe, secure, and attractive public realm. Adopted Citywide Design Guides discourage visible ground level parking, but do not expressly address parking above the ground floor. The Downtown Design Guidelines does address parking above the ground floor, limiting revealed above-grade parking to three levels.