

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Where Do We Park Those Cars?

October 31, 2013

Parking is the way most people get to work—and most are not paying for it; their companies and/or the cities in which they are located are.

“Parking is the dominant feature of the urban environment,” said Dave King, assistant professor of architecture, planning and preservation at Columbia University. Parking ramps and surface lots dot city landscapes and “parking is bundled into the cost of everything.”

King was part of a panel on Where Do We Park Those Cars? Innovative Parking Strategies, the second in a ULI Minnesota series of discussions about building better, healthier communities.

An oversupply of parking spaces

Zoning codes tend to require more parking spaces than are actually used, King said, creating a system that is designed for sprawl. Parking crowds out better buildings, makes downtown streets less hospitable to pedestrians and creates significant opportunity losses for cities.

King recommends reducing the parking required for new developments, unbundling parking from buildings and creating shared parking; increasing transit, ridesharing and taxis; prioritizing pedestrians; and requiring parking structures, when built, to be adaptable to other uses.

[King PowerPoint](#)

Reusing parking structures

People are driving less today, according to Tom Fisher, dean of the University of Minnesota College of Design, partly because of gas prices and partly because younger people, the so-called Millennials, are just not as attached to their cars as their parents and grandparents. “Increasingly, people are going to be living, working and making in very close proximity,” Fisher said.

That will mean, he said, that the density and mix of uses on every block will increase dramatically, but there will be less need for parking spaces. Ramps will need to be reused in some new way, he said, which should impact what is built today. “Every time we build a sloped-floor parking ramp, we’re going to have to eventually tear it down,” Fisher said. “And we will be tearing them down, probably in our lifetime.”

New ramps may still need to be built, but Fisher urged that they be built with multiple uses over time in mind. That means, in part, with flat floors, rather than sloped and at least a 10-foot minimum height.

[Fisher PowerPoint](#)

Legacy parking lots

In Minneapolis, although establishment of new surface parking lots has been prohibited since 1999, existing lots still take up a significant amount of downtown land, especially in

East Downtown, where the new football stadium will be built. Beth Elliott, principal city planner for the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development, said there are three primary categories of owners for these properties: commercial parking lots, often owned by families who see them as an important source of long-term income; lots owned by developers, who may be holding them for potential development; and employer-owned lots, serving various businesses. The city approaches each of these kinds of owners differently, in an attempt to make way for more intense, transit-oriented development.

Parking will be part of the development of the area, Elliott said, but the goal is to have it either below buildings or embedded in the buildings; there will be no new surface parking lots and the lots that currently exist in that area are expected to disappear as new residential, retail, business and a park are developed. The City is working on a new formula for purchase of surface parking lots so the land can be used for development. "Development can only occur when it creates a supportable land value for the developer," she said.

[Elliott PowerPoint](#)