

TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD

**CERTIFIED
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TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

JUNE 13, 2023, 7:00 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS

**Re: Ordinance Amending Multifamily Residential
Parking Requirements**

DEBRA A. CHASSE, CSR #00055

APPEARANCES:

Town Council Members Present:

SHARI CANTOR, MAYOR

LIAM SWEENEY, DEPUTY MAYOR

CAROL BLANKS

ALBERTO CORTES

DEBRA POLUN

MARY FAY

ALSO PRESENT:

RICK LEDWITH, TOWN MANAGER

LEON DAVIDOFF, TOWN CLERK/COUNCIL CLERK

DALLAS DODGE, CORPORATION COUNSEL

1 MAYOR CANTOR: It is now 7 o'clock,
2 so we will begin the Ordinance Amending Multifamily
3 Residential Parking Requirements. We'll start with
4 role call. Mr. Davidoff.

5 MR. DAVIDOFF: Thank you, Madam
6 Mayor. Councilor Blanks.

7 MS. BLANKS: Present.

8 MR. DAVIDOFF: Mayor Cantor.

9 MAYOR CANTOR: Here.

10 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Cortes.

11 MR. CORTES: Here.

12 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Fay.

13 MS. FAY: Present.

14 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor McGinnis.
15 Councilor Polun.

16 MS. POLUN: Here.

17 MR. DAVIDOFF: Deputy Mayor Sweeney.

18 MR. SWEENEY: Here.

19 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Wenograd.
20 Councilor Zydanowicz. Six councilors present.

21 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you, Mr.
22 Davidoff. I just want, again, to note it is high
23 school graduation. One of our counselors had his son's
24 graduation and the other two counselors are traveling
25 for family commitments. So we have -- we have a

1 quorum, so we will continue. And I will call the town
2 manager.

3 MR. LEDWITH: Thanks, Madam Mayor.
4 The following public hearing is in regards to an
5 Ordinance Amending Residential Parking Requirements.
6 This ordinance was discussed in two separate Community
7 Planning & Economic Development Committee meetings, the
8 most recent being last month in May. As we discussed
9 in CPED Public Act 21-29 created a number of standards
10 that municipalities and zoning regulations must not be
11 in conflict with, including the establishment of a
12 parking maximum requirement for residential units by
13 bedroom type.

14 The intent of this provision is to
15 limit artificially high parking minimums, which our
16 staff is certainly in support of, as parking surplus
17 can lead to a number of negative impacts, including
18 environmental impacts and loss of tree and vegetative
19 cover, to name a couple.

20 These changes will bring us in line
21 with Public Act 21-29; however, it does not prevent us
22 from continuing to explore parking zoning ordinances to
23 continue to minimize parking standards as much as
24 possible, which is also an action item under our plan
25 of conservation and development.

1 At this point through you, Madam
2 Mayor, I'll turn to our town planner, Mr. Dumais, to
3 provide us with a summary of the changes to this
4 ordinance. Thank you.

5 MR. DUMAIS: Thank you, Mr. Ledwith,
6 Madam Mayor, members of the Council. Just for
7 housekeeping purposes, you should have two referral
8 letters, one from the Town Planning & Zoning Commission
9 and one from the Capitol Region Council for
10 Governments, both favorable referrals on the ordinance
11 pending.

12 As the manager said, this ordinance
13 seeks to take our parking standards and make them
14 aligned with the state requirements. So the state
15 sought to curb artificially high minimums, and they
16 essentially imposed a standard on municipalities that
17 chose to opt into the program to create a
18 maximum/minimum that you could require for any
19 residential development. It was by bedroom type.

20 Now, this differed from the way West
21 Hartford regulates parking for residential units. We
22 do so on a one and a half space per dwelling is the
23 standard, regardless of bedroom type. In the past two
24 instances when this was discussed at CPED, I went
25 through an analysis of the last ten years of housing

1 and showed you examples of how our standard differed
2 from the state standard and why the approach before you
3 seeks to right size that and seeks to incentivize the
4 minimum amount of parking to support residential units.
5 The ordinance does that by allowing for our existing
6 standard to stay in place for two or three family
7 dwelling units, unless a lesser number is required by
8 the state statute. The state statute says that the
9 municipality can't impose more than one parking space
10 per studio or one bedroom unit or two spaces for
11 anything more.

12 When we did our analysis, we
13 looked -- in the past ten years we looked at 20
14 residential developments, and our local ordinance
15 provided for less parking in 14 of those 20 instances.
16 So six of them, there was -- if we applied the state
17 standard, we would have gotten less parking required.

18 This ordinance seeks to blend the
19 two and provide the flexibility to ensure we're
20 consistent with the state standard but also not
21 providing or requiring too much parking.

22 Having said that, if we look at the
23 actual amount of parking approved and built, there's a
24 difference. So our standard -- in the 20 projects we
25 analyzed, we looked at ten of those. The developers in

1 ten cases proposed more parking than our standards
2 required. Five of them, they proposed the minimum
3 standard we required and another five, through your
4 authority as a special development authority and zoning
5 authority, you allowed for and approved less parking
6 based on actual parking demands. That's been the trend
7 you've seen and approved of recently, and it's really
8 on a location specific basis. Throughout the center,
9 you've recently approved many projects that have
10 demonstrated, based on parking analysis and demand, you
11 can improve and you can support less parking being
12 provided on site.

13 Recently, with the adoption of the
14 transit oriented development district, you approved the
15 new standard that is for the demand driven. So if
16 anyone wants to come in and provide less parking, they
17 can use time of day or shared parking methodology. The
18 goal of that is to reduce the amount of parking being
19 built and encourage and fill another rehabilitation of
20 parking areas.

21 You may have seen a letter come from
22 Bike West Hartford. In that letter, the authors of the
23 letter raise a number of very valid points that are
24 largely echoed in our whereas clause for this
25 ordinance, that minimum parking requirements can

1 suppress economic development. They can increase the
2 cost of housing and suppress housing affordability.
3 They can encourage sprawl. They have a negative
4 environmental impact.

5 As the manager said, this ordinance
6 is a small step and just makes us consistent with the
7 statute and doesn't preclude or stop us from continuing
8 that positive momentum to right size our parking
9 standards.

10 The plan of conservation and
11 development offers a number of strategies, both in the
12 economic and development sections. I just want to read
13 them in for the record. Something we should consider
14 is the review of our parking zoning ordinances to
15 identify potential areas for modification to modernize
16 the approach to commercial parking requirements. So
17 that's an action item suggested by our POZ.

18 Similarly, in our transportation
19 sections, it suggests that we review our zoning
20 ordinances and revise as necessary to support --
21 approach and support transit oriented bikeable,
22 walkable, and innovative trends in the transportation
23 fields and to do so suggest that we review our parking
24 ordinances to meet and modernize those approaches.

25 And, then, similarly, in our open space

1 and environment role, there's another action item to
2 review ordinances to encourage and support sustainable
3 development practices.

4 All of these things we certainly can
5 do and should do, and with the manager's direction I
6 think that planning staff would be excited to work on
7 these in the coming months to take a look at the POCD
8 outlines and how we can bring our parking standards
9 into a more modern approach. This ordinance before you
10 is the first step in that process.

11 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you very much.
12 Can you just -- you had said that if you opt into the
13 program. So how is this, if you don't opt in, what --
14 I'm just curious on how that works.

15 MR. DUMAIS: There's a public
16 hearing opt out provision built into the statute,
17 whereby the state would have to go through a public
18 hearing process. I would have to turn to corporate
19 counsel to look at the statute, but there is a public
20 hearing, public notice requirement whereby you have to
21 make a decision and state why we're opting out of this
22 standard.

23 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you. And then
24 there's just one other point that I wanted to
25 emphasize. As you said, the SED process allows us the

1 ability to, on a project basis, to reduce the required
2 parking from the town ordinance. This analogy would
3 not be a consistent state ordinance.

4 MR. DUMAIS: Right.

5 MAYOR CANTOR: And while we're
6 looking for Mr. Dodge, do you have --

7 MR. DODGE: Thank you, Madam Mayor.
8 Dallas Dodge, corporation counsel. Just to follow up
9 on what the town planner said, it's an opt out
10 provision under state statute, so if the town wanted to
11 adopt a standard that was a higher parking requirement
12 than the state statute, then you would be required to
13 publish a hearing, have a two-thirds vote and make
14 certain findings in order to opt out of the state
15 program.

16 The reason that the ordinance is
17 drafted the way it is, where it makes reference to the
18 existing ordinance and the state statute is the lesser
19 of which one was because our ordinance and the state
20 statute basically speak in two different languages.
21 Our ordinance speaks in terms of dwelling units, where
22 state statute speaks in terms of number of bedrooms
23 that are in the dwelling unit. So the easiest way to
24 sort of marry the two because, as we went through
25 different analyses of or different scenarios where

1 there were some instances where under our ordinance,
2 you might have a lesser parking requirement and other
3 instances where, under state statute, you had a lesser
4 parking requirement and knowing that the direction that
5 the council wanted to go with it, the easiest way to
6 marry the two was to simply say that in instances where
7 there's a conflict between state statute and our
8 ordinance, that it will be the lesser of those two
9 standards that applies, so that's why the ordinance is
10 drafted the way it is.

11 There's another important provision
12 here, too, which is for builders who come to the town.
13 This is basically a notice provision to them now,
14 whereas they look at our ordinance, they're sort of put
15 on notice to make sure to go look at the state statute
16 and see if there's a lesser provision in there than
17 what's under ordinance so that they can make sure
18 they're not in conflict with that.

19 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you very much,
20 Mr. Dodge. Can we look for public comment on -- Mr.
21 Clerk, have you received any written in comments?

22 MR. DAVIDOFF: Yes, Madam Mayor. We
23 received a letter from Bike West Hartford, Inc., as
24 well as an e-mail from Kevin McKernan. Both of those
25 correspondence pieces have been uploaded to the agenda

1 docket.

2 MAYOR CANTOR: I have three people
3 that have signed up to speak, and if you haven't signed
4 up, we'll ask if you want to speak. So the first
5 person, you have three minutes to speak; unless you
6 represent a group, you can speak for five. We'll start
7 with Thomas Martin. Please state your name and address
8 for the record.

9 MR. MARTIN: Good evening, Town
10 Councilors. My name is Thomas Martin, and I live at
11 134 Woodrow Street. I also represent the board of Bike
12 West Hartford, a local nonprofit.

13 Tonight the town council will
14 consider changes to West Hartford's parking
15 requirements. However, I'm here today to respectfully
16 request that the council eliminate minimum parking
17 requirements altogether. For those unaware, minimum
18 parking requirements are zoning regulations that
19 mandate a certain number of parking spaces be provided
20 for each new development, and there are a number of
21 problems with these requirements. They make it more
22 expensive to build housing, which makes development of
23 affordable housing difficult. They lead to more
24 traffic congestion. When developers are required to
25 build a certain number of parking spaces, they often

1 build more parking than is needed. This parking
2 induces demand for more trips in a car.

3 These requirements also increase the
4 amount of land dedicated to parking. This land could
5 be used for other purposes, such as housing, parks, or
6 businesses. Cities and towns across the United States
7 have increasingly begun to eliminate minimum parking
8 requirements with much success and commendation. Even
9 the National Parking Association, the leading industry
10 trade group of parking operators, is a supporter.

11 Eliminating minimum parking
12 requirements will not eliminate parking itself. I want
13 to be clear. We need parking. Instead, the
14 elimination of minimum parking requirement would allow
15 our community and developers to make market-based
16 decisions based on supply and demand.

17 Which brings me to the former UConn
18 campus, a treasured 57 acres in our town where over 50
19 percent of the developable land is currently proposed
20 to be a parking lot. Our regulation should be flexible
21 enough to allow the developer to think outside the box
22 to allow for less parking and to allow for a more
23 sustainable development that will benefit each member
24 of our community. Thank you for your time and
25 consideration.

1 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you, Mr.
2 Martin. The next person I have is Rayland Connor.

3 MR. CONNOR. It's Richard. Bad
4 handwriting. I'll speak for Abby Moore, as well, who
5 is on the list. Richard Connor, a resident of West
6 Hartford, also a developer doing projects in Windsor
7 and looking to do projects in West Hartford, as well.
8 I just wanted to echo from the rest of the group to
9 eliminate minimum parking requirements, because it
10 helps spur development in the area just making it a
11 better community to live in and drive economics up.
12 Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity.

13 MAYOR CANTOR: Thank you, Mr.
14 Connor. Your address, for the record, is 400 --

15 MR. MARTIN: 490.

16 MAYOR CANTOR: Correct that for the
17 record.

18 Any other people that would like to
19 speak and have not signed up? Questions from the
20 council? Are there any questions from the town
21 council? Okay.

22 So just as a summary, this ordinance
23 is aligning us with the state standards, their minimum
24 requirements, and so the information that was provided
25 to us written in and you heard tonight would be subject

1 of a different ordinance and a different public
2 hearing. But that is something that we will be
3 bringing to committee and talking about.

4 So with that, I want to read into
5 the record as Mr. Dumais said, letter dated June 9,
6 2023 from the Town Planning & Zoning Commission
7 recommending approval. Letter dated May 30, 2023 from
8 the Capital Region Council for Governments finding no
9 apparent conflict in the regional plans and policies or
10 the concerns of the neighboring towns. One more time
11 for questions? Okay. I think we will close this
12 public hearing, and with are now ready for -- so this
13 public hearing is now adjourned.

14 (Whereupon, the Hearing was
15 adjourned at 7:15 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

**I, DEBRA A. CHASSE, Court Reporter and
Notary Public within and for the State of Connecticut,
duly commissioned and qualified, do hereby certify that
the foregoing 15 pages are a complete and accurate
computer-aided transcription of my original verbatim
notes taken of the Public Hearing held before the West
Hartford Town Council.**

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my
hand and affixed my notarial seal this 28th day of June,
2023.**



**Debra A. Chasse, CSR
Notary Public
State of Connecticut**

**My Commission Expires:
June 30, 2026
CSR No. 00055**