

# Counting Spaces, Building Homes: A Flexible Approach to Meeting Parking Mandates

How cities and towns can unlock more homes and more affordability by counting already-existing spaces toward new projects.

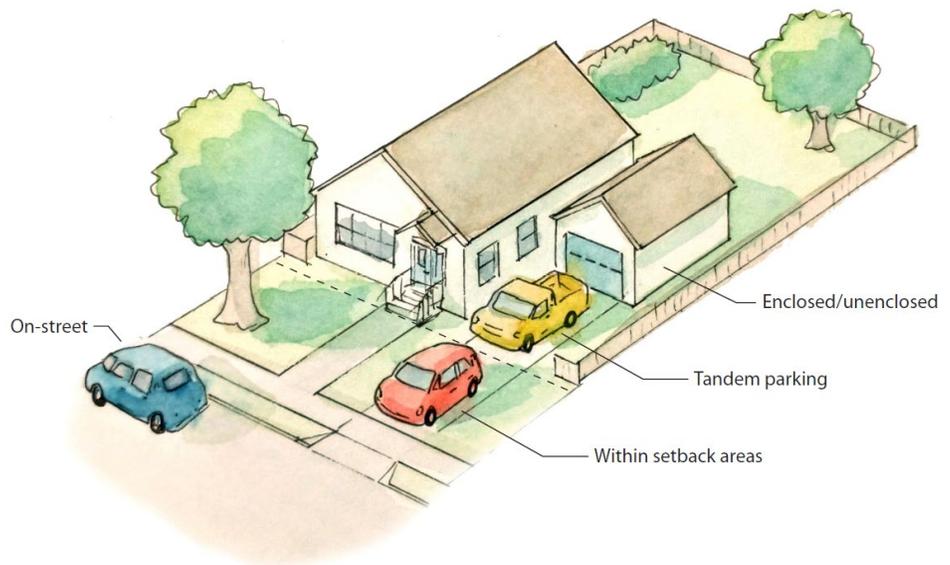
Sightline Institute | December 2023

For decades, local rules requiring every new building to have a predetermined number of parking spaces have pushed up housing costs and thwarted building enough homes for all of our neighbors. But just because a car can park there doesn't make it a legal parking spot, according to city code in many Washington communities. Rules defining what "counts" toward mandatory parking minimums vary across jurisdictions and housing types. When property owners come up short of what's required, parking minimums can block much-needed housing from getting built at all.

Counting existing on-street parking, garages, or shared driveways can make the difference, especially for small projects only needing a handful of parking spaces. Allowing existing parking options to count can meet residents' parking needs without burdening builders—and ultimately, the residents buying or renting those homes—with constructing costly and unnecessary parking.

Cities and towns could unlock more homes and more affordability by allowing the following types of parking spaces to count for all kinds of homes, including multifamily buildings:

- **Within setback areas**, like between a garage and the street
- **Enclosed or unenclosed**, like garages and carports
- **Tandem parking**, like a shared driveway
- **On-street** options adjacent to the property



Even where parking mandates no longer apply, driveway standards are often **more prescriptive for multifamily housing than detached houses**, creating barriers to options like infill housing, group and co-living options, and triplexes and fourplexes. Some cities are adapting, others not:

- In Eugene, Oregon, a local builder who is adding four homes to a backyard needs to apply for a variance to keep the existing driveway. In Eugene’s code, **parking areas are not allowed in the front setbacks** for anything other than detached houses and duplexes.
- In 2023, the city of Kent, Washington, started counting **garage parking spaces** toward totals for single-detached homes, to encourage owners to build accessory dwelling units without additional parking costs. Overnight, Kent doubled the number of legal parking spaces a typical single-detached home had.
- A single-detached property turned residential care home in Beaverton, Oregon, had to turn away prospective residents because of parking. Despite having five parking spaces to use between the driveway and garage, they only “counted” as two (towards the requirement of four) because the driveway **backed out onto the street** and the property was no longer classified as a single-detached home.
- Anchorage, Alaska, prohibits **driveways for triplexes** from backing out onto the street, meaning these properties must include space for cars to turn around.
- **Tandem parking** only counts for single-detached homes and duplexes in Olympia and Yakima, Washington, but multifamily housing should be able to use it, too. The 290-unit [Aerte building](#) in Kirkland, Washington, successfully uses a “parking buddy” system for its space-saving parking layout.

## Draft legislative language

*Cities and counties shall enforce land use regulations for residential development as provided in this section:*

- Garages and carports may not be required;*
- Parking spaces that shall count towards the minimum parking requirement may be enclosed or unenclosed;*
- Adjacent on-street parking spaces shall count towards off-street parking mandates at a rate of one space for every twenty (20) linear feet of uninterrupted curb space;*
- Parking spaces in tandem (having two or more vehicles, one in front of or behind the others with a single means of ingress and egress) shall count towards meeting minimum parking requirements at a rate of one space for every twenty (20) linear feet;*
- Parking spaces and driveways may be located in required yard setbacks;*
- Gravel surfacing may not be prohibited as a parking area material;*
- Parking areas for residential developments may not be prohibited from backing out onto the street provided that the driveway and parking area comply with all other local regulations;*
- Required parking spaces may be provided off-site, within 2,000 feet of pedestrian travel of a site. If any parking is provided on site, required parking for people with disabilities shall be on site;*
- Parking spaces may not be required to exceed 8’ x 16’, except for required accessible parking spaces.*