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Subject: Parking Spaces Matter
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Urban Design Commission Members:

I was alarmed by your discussion during the meeting on Wednesday, April 30, regarding the number of parking spaces that were included in the design of the townhouse project at 9453 Spirit Way (Legistar 86796). The conclusion I heard at the end of the conversation was that as long as the Urban Design Commission was not requiring the developer or recommending to the Plan Commission to reduce the number of parking spaces below the minimum number required by the zoning code, the UDC has the authority, and maybe even the obligation, to remove parking spaces from a proposed project as it sees fit to do so. You appeared to assert that as long as it is not causing a violation of the zoning code, the UDC is free to specify an arbitrarily selected number of parking spaces it thinks are the correct amount to include in a project.

Where in the zoning code does it give the UDC the authority to decide how many parking spaces are the correct number to include in a project? In this specific instance, I challenge you and the City Attorney's office to point to where in the zoning code it grants the UDC authority to attempt to manipulate the number of parking spaces or parking ratio as part of providing advice to the Plan Commission about "the exterior design and appearance of all principal structures and the landscape plans for all proposed residential building complexes."


If there is ambiguity regarding whether the UDC has such authority, Smart Growth will seek to work with alders to make it clear in the new UDC ordinance that the UDC does not have such authority.

Furthermore, the parking ratio in the zoning code often is the least important parking ratio. For example, in some locations and for some uses, the zoning code does not require any minimum number of parking spaces. The developer, based on their experience, has a good sense of the parking ratio they need to include in a project to make it likely that they can lease up or sell the units. Usually, developers must borrow money to make a project happen, and lenders often have their own opinions regarding the parking ratio that is needed in order for them to be willing to make a loan for a project.

Developers spend tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars, before they are able to bring a project to the UDC for review, hoping when the process is done that they will be left with a project that they can actually obtain financing for, construct, and lease up or sell the units. How many of you have experience taking this kind of risk and successfully bringing real estate development projects to completion? What makes you think you know better than the developer proposing a project regarding how many off-street parking spaces are needed in a project for it to be successful?

Or are you saying that it should be irrelevant to the UDC whether your subjective opinion regarding the correct number of parking spaces to include in a project renders a project

unlikely to be constructed because of the risk that a lack of off-street parking spaces might make renters or buyers unwilling to pay the level of rent/price need to make the project work financially?

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