

# Parking Reimagined

MARCH 2022 UPDATE

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## Project Summary

Fairfax County's parking requirements have not been comprehensively reviewed since 1988, although certain uses, such as regional malls and single family attached dwelling units, were updated. During the past thirty-four years development and travel patterns and the associated need for parking have changed significantly in response to changes in technology and demographics, among other things. Access to the internet, along with flexible telework options and convenient home delivery of goods, has decreased residents need or desire to drive to locations to shop or work. The County has seen the growth of transit availability with the expansion of Metrorail and bus service and the movement towards compact walkable mixed-use communities has further decreased the need for vehicle trips. The Parking Reimagined project will comprehensively review the parking requirements to modernize how the County regulates parking and determine methods to right-size these requirements, as may be appropriate. In addition to updating parking rates, the project will evaluate current administrative processes to identify means to facilitate changes to the benefit of our businesses and residents.

It is recognized that driving a car will continue to be a common activity and that parking will continue to be necessary. However, parking should be considered with other community and personal values. These include equity, convenience, environment, affordability, economics, and placemaking, all reflected in the goals of [One Fairfax](#) and the County's [Strategic Plan Initiatives](#).

The following values were discussed during the October 12, 2021, joint meeting of the Board of Supervisors (Board) and the Planning Commission and continue to inform the review of the project.

- **Equity.** In older communities, surface parking areas are often the front face of commercial and multifamily properties. Outdated parking requirements can limit the ability to update buildings and provide for additional reinvestment opportunities that would benefit the community. Furthermore, during the engagement with the community, the project team has heard of the need to improve sidewalks, trails and transit options in underserved areas of the County. Without those improvements, residents will continue to be car dependent.
- **Personal Convenience.** Choosing to drive a personal vehicle to a destination, instead of taking a form of transit, demonstrates the value of convenience. Businesses recognize the desire for this convenience and often provide significant area for surface parking at the expense of green space or development opportunities. Reduction of parking can be a perceived inconvenience if a space is not

readily available. The project team is aware of concerns related to overflow parking on to nearby residential streets or adjacent businesses that can impact neighboring communities.

- **Environmental Stewardship.** For each parking space built there is an impact to the environment caused by additional impervious surface. These impacts include loss of open space, increased impacts from stormwater runoff, and creation of artificial heat islands.
- **Affordability/Economics.** While parking may be free to the user, the provision of parking has a cost. The builder of the parking area pays to construct the spaces. This cost is passed to the tenant through increased costs to lease the space and to the consumer in increased cost of goods to cover the initial cost of construction and ongoing maintenance of the parking area. These costs are also realized by residential developers and passed onto renters and owners in terms of higher rents and sales price.
- **Placemaking.** Large parking lots located between the building and sidewalks/roads reduce the ability to walk and can create an uninviting pedestrian environment. The location and design of parking can have a significant impact on how a site is viewed by the public. An artificially high parking requirement can reduce opportunities for development or preservation of open space.

### **Project Goals and Activities to Date**

At the beginning of the project, the project team identified key project goals. An update of these follows:

- **Engage the community to better understand and incorporate their needs and values.** Since October 2021, the project team has held town hall meetings, updated the Planning Commission's Land Use Process Review Committee, and has met with several Board Advisory Committees, industry groups and County agencies to better understand how parking regulations impact these stakeholders. A complete list of the outreach activities is attached. Furthermore, a citizen workgroup consisting of fifteen community members with varying backgrounds has been formed to provide feedback on the project initiatives. The project team will continue to outreach with the community through the local land use advisory committees, town halls open to all residents, and other avenues identified by the Board and the community. A [project webpage](#) has been established which offers informative content about the Parking Reimagined project, including a list of future community engagement meetings and a video library of previous meetings.

Common themes from the outreach include:

- **One Size Fits All Regulatory Approach.** With the diversity of the County, a one size fits all regulatory approach to parking should not continue. The parking needs for areas of the County differ and require specific solutions for specific places.
- **Transit Service.** Lack of access to transit services, transit service frequency and concerns regarding reliability of transit service have been cited by participants as reducing opportunities for use of other transportation modes besides personal vehicles. This is allied with comments that continuing to build easily available parking encourages people to drive in their own vehicles as opposed to using transit.

- **Environment.** Many stakeholders want to see a net environmental benefit as a tradeoff for lesser parking requirements. While additional development may be appropriate, there has been an expressed desire to see parking reductions translate to more open space, increased landscaping in and around parking lots and improvements to stormwater management of sites.
- **Neighborhood Street and Spillover Parking.** Concerns that reduced parking requirements could cause spillover parking on neighborhood streets that are adjacent to commercial areas is an issue that has been raised. While this project is not examining on-street parking, successful off-street parking rightsizing could reduce spillover parking. The Fairfax County Department of Transportation is conducting an on-street parking study and the project team is coordinating with them during this project.
- **Specific Rates.** Concern was raised that certain required parking rates are not adequate and should be examined. Specifically, single family attached, religious assembly, and school uses were identified as being a concern.
- **Walkability.** A critical factor to the community is walkability, which directly contributes to the success of initiatives to reduce parking demand. The need for quality pedestrian connectivity throughout the County is important and well-designed pathways within new development are necessary.
- **Analyze best practices and learn from our peers about the most effective initiatives associated with off-street parking.** The project team and its consultant Clarion-Nelson/Nygaard conducted a peer review of nine regional and national municipalities, to assess best practices used in other communities. A summary of the [national](#) and [regional](#) peer review is linked and available on the project webpage.

Feedback from this peer review process and from the community outreach has helped guide and reinforce project-related ideas and concepts that are under consideration. These include:

- **Transit Availability.** Proximity to transit is a consideration in determining parking requirements. The primary function of transit is to provide an alternative to personal vehicle use. The ready availability of parking reduces the effectiveness of transit to provide an alternative to driving. If parking is freely available, drivers will continue to use their cars for commuting and visiting the area. Lower parking supply increases the value of investing in transit. The Zoning Ordinance currently has lower parking requirements for properties designated by the Comprehensive Plan as Transit Station Areas, such as Tysons and Reston.
- **Parking Maximums.** The expansion of the use of maximum parking requirements is also under consideration. Parking maximums impose an upper limit to the amount of parking provided for a specific use. This helps ensure that parking is not overbuilt in areas that have transit availability and multi-modal infrastructure. As noted, abundant parking defeats Comprehensive Plan and multimodal transportation goals associated with these areas. Currently, parking maximums are in place in the Zoning Ordinance regulations in Tysons. These could be expanded to other transit areas.

- **Multimodal Infrastructure.** The availability of multimodal transportation options, such as transit, bicycling, and walking, to reduce the need for car ownership directly correlates to the amount of parking needed for a subject property. Particularly in higher density development areas within the County, these options are more easily accessible. When people who live and work in these areas have an ability to easily walk, use an electric scooter, or bicycle to a destination, these options translate to less parking needed on sites. Also, the growth of ridesharing allows people to forego their personal vehicle to reach a destination. Less parking further reinforces the use of transportation options, building upon the goal of creating a compact, multi-modal community.
- **Incorporate current experience and innovations to update parking requirements and administrative practices.** The project team is looking at consolidation/simplification and adjustment of rates. An example of simplification of rates is the basing of parking rates on the size of the building versus the number of employees the use may have and the occupancy of the building. The building square footage is a known quantity through all phases of building development and use; whereas the number of employees may not be known when the parking supply is established or when a use changes. A recent example of adjusting rates was the County update of the rates for regional shopping centers in 2019. Shopping centers have evolved over time and the new rate still provides for adequate parking but also provides for development opportunities to convert areas of surface parking to residential and office uses, creating a new sense of place for the entire retail site.
- **Streamline the parking review process.** The project team is reviewing the Zoning Ordinance to determine how the parking review process can be simplified and streamlined through the application of best practices. For example, the project team is examining possible modifications to accommodate tenant changes or changes in use without the need to reexamine the existing parking. Currently, new tenants in existing buildings are often required to provide a parking tabulation. In many cases, minor parking deficiencies are found, which result in denial of a nonresidential use permit. The project team is exploring opportunities to revamp the parking tabulation requirements by consolidating rates and permitting new uses to utilize the existing parking rates. Currently, an office tenant would be parked at an office rate but if the tenant leaves and a school of specialized instruction assumes the lease there can be a parking tabulation issue. Office parks at a square footage rate and the school of specialized instruction parks at a student and employee rate. According to the parking tabulation the new use requires more spaces than are attributed to the office suite. A potential solution is to park the office building at one rate regardless of tenants similar to how we park a shopping center. This will permit new tenants to assume a lease without the artificial barrier of the parking tabulation.

### **Proposed Conceptual Framework**

A tiered approach to parking regulations is under consideration. This approach recognizes that the County has a variety of development types with different access to modes of travel. In the suburban residential and low-intensity commercial areas of the County, most travel requires a car. In the highest density and intensity areas, such as areas near Metrorail stations, more options for travel exist as these areas are well-served by transit and tend to be more walkable. They have a mix of uses to serve employment, living, retail services, and entertainment that are closely located to one another. Parking requirements should reflect these diverse areas. A higher amount of parking should be required in areas that are more car-dependent; less parking required in areas where non-auto travel is easier. Thus, the project team is proposing a framework which would create three distinct parking tiers organized based on low, medium and high development

densities/intensities, which captures a basic element of building density and intensity. Further, each tier would allow for adjustment of parking rates in locations that meet transit area criteria. A map of the proposed tiers and description is provided below.

- **Tier 1.** Low density/intensity areas which comprises most of the County. Parking regulations for Tier 1 properties that are not located in a defined transit area would likely see only minor changes, including simplification of parking rates. Locations within Tier 1 which meet transit area criteria are proposed to be permitted modest parking rate reductions.
- **Tier 2.** Medium density/intensity sites/areas which generally have some level of land use diversity. Parking rates for Tier 2 properties, not located in transit areas, would generally be consistent with those in Tier 1 transit area rates. Properties located within Tier 2 transit areas are being considered for reduced minimum parking requirements and most uses are proposed to be subject to maximum parking requirements.
- **Tier 3.** Highest intensity development and areas promoting urban, mixed-use, transit, and multimodal oriented development. Parking rates for Tier 3 properties that are not located in transit areas would generally mirror Tier 2 Transit Areas minimum and maximum rates. Properties located within Tier 3 Transit Areas are not proposed to be subject to minimum parking requirements and most uses would be subject to maximum parking requirements. The project team is also considering allowing properties located within a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area as designated by the Comprehensive Plan to be able to opt into the Tier 3 regulations either through the entitlement process or by a separate request.
- **Transit Area Criteria.** In addition to site specific requests, the Zoning Ordinance permits the reduction of parking requirements for uses located within a Transit Station Area (TSA) and a Commercial Revitalization District (CRD). The conceptual framework proposes to expand this practice by permitting reductions in a to be defined Transit Area for parking purposes. The project team is considering including the following areas due to their proximity to transit, mixed use, and urban centric development characteristics, which inherently promotes the use of multimodal transportation:
  - **Transit Station Areas.** The Zoning Ordinance currently permits reduction of parking requirements for uses located within a TSA designated by the Comprehensive Plan due to the area's proximity to Metrorail.
  - **Tysons Urban Center.** The Zoning Ordinance currently permits projects not zoned to Planned Tysons Corner (PTC) in the area designated as Tysons Urban Center to opt into the PTC parking rates. The PTC rates removes minimum requirements for many uses and establishes maximum parking rates. The conceptual framework would incorporate many of the PTC concepts into the Tier 2 and Tier 3 rates and eliminate the specific rates for the PTC District.

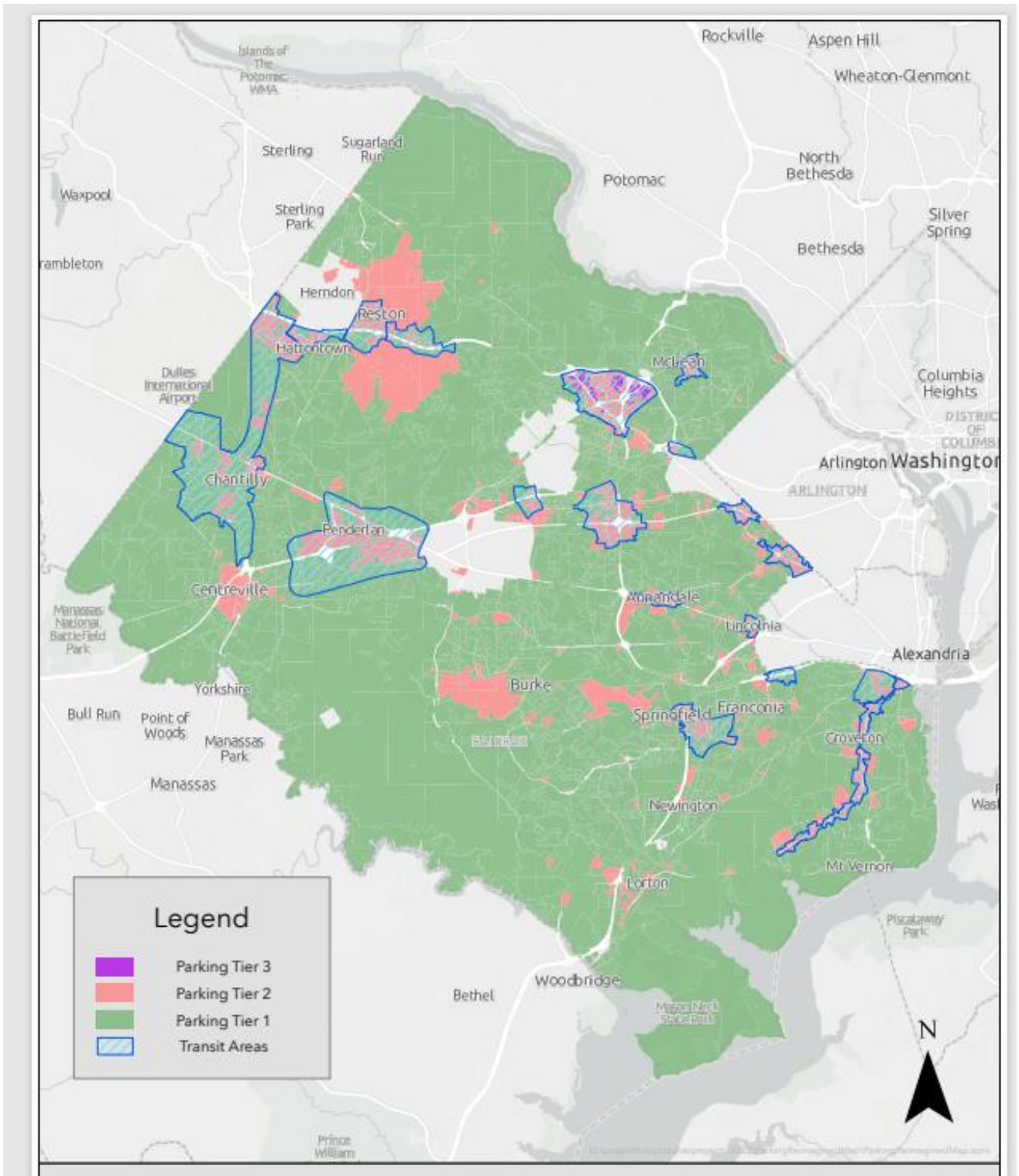


Figure 1: Map of Potential Tiers and Transit Areas

- **Commercial Revitalization Districts (CRDs).** The Zoning Ordinance currently permits a 20 percent parking reduction in CRDs through Board approval with the reductions being automatic in the Richmond Highway CRD.
- **Community Business Centers (CBCs).** The Comprehensive Plan encourages the redevelopment of areas designated as CBCs with a mix of uses focused around core areas of high intensity development, such as town centers in a pedestrian-oriented setting. Further, all CBCs, except for Kingstowne and Lincolnia, are partially or fully located with Commercial Revitalization Districts which are currently permitted parking reductions.
- **Suburban Centers:** While density/intensity of development in the Dulles, Fairfax Center, and Merrifield Suburban Centers vary, each encourages mixed use development around core transit station or town center areas that are more urban in nature. These characteristics along with proximity to transit and multimodal infrastructure warrant the inclusion of these areas for a Transit Area.

Figure 2 below provides an example of how the tiered approach could be applied based to a specific use. Higher parking requirements are associated with lower intensity of development in Tier 1. Lower parking requirements progress across the tiers as development intensifies and higher-grade transit facilities become available reflecting the need for less spaces based on transit, mix of uses and intensity of development.

The chart also shows a conceptual simplification of an existing rate. The current rate for Use X is reliant on knowing employee and occupancy load information at any stage of the project. This can be difficult to assess because these variables change based on the operational status of the use. However, utilizing the square footage of the structure associated with the use provides a consistent approach as the square footage is easily measured at any stage of the project. This approach aligns with the goal to simplify how parking is calculated for the end user. This is similar to the recent update for parking for restaurants where the rate was changed from number of seats and employees to square footage of the building.

Use	Current Required	Tier 1		Tier 2			Tier 3		
		Non-Transit Area Required	Transit Area Required	Non-Transit Area Required	Transit Area Required		Non-Transit Area Required		Transit Area Required
Use X	1 space per 3 persons based on the occupancy load; plus 1 space per employee	4 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA	2.5 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA	3 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA	2 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA	3 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA	No Minimum Requirement	Tier 2 NTA Requirement Ratio (3 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA)	Tier 2 Transit Area Requirement Ratio (2 spaces per 1,000 SF GFA)

Figure 2: Example of the conceptual framework parking requirements

## **Topics Under Consideration**

### **Off-Street Loading and Vehicle Stacking**

The Zoning Ordinance provisions pertaining to off-street loading have seen little change since the adoption of the 1978 Zoning Ordinance and zMOD carried forward the rates with the expectation that they would be reviewed as part of this process. During the entitlement process, off-street loading requirements are often modified or waived based on experience of the usage of loading spaces. The project team is reviewing existing off-street loading requirements to determine how these requirements should be modified. The project team is also reviewing vehicle stacking requirements for drive-through uses to determine if our existing stacking requirements are appropriate.

### **Bicycle Parking**

Currently, staff uses FCDOT's [Bicycle Parking Guidelines](#) to review bike parking supply and facilities proposals to negotiate commitments during the entitlement process. The project team proposes to include the establishment of minimum bicycle parking requirements as part of this Parking Reimagined effort. Including minimum requirements will reinforce encouragement and support of this alternative to car travel and parking. FCDOT staff is currently in the process of updating the 2017 Bicycle Parking Guidelines.

### **Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC)**

In 2021, the County approved the ability to count EVC spaces in the total parking area. Previously, these spaces were in addition to the minimum required spaces. This was done to encourage more EVC parking spaces. A potential next step would be the establishment of a minimum required number of EVC spaces. Currently, EVC spaces are requested to be provided during the entitlement process. In addition, EVC providers are partnering with shopping centers and other retailers to provide these services within the County.

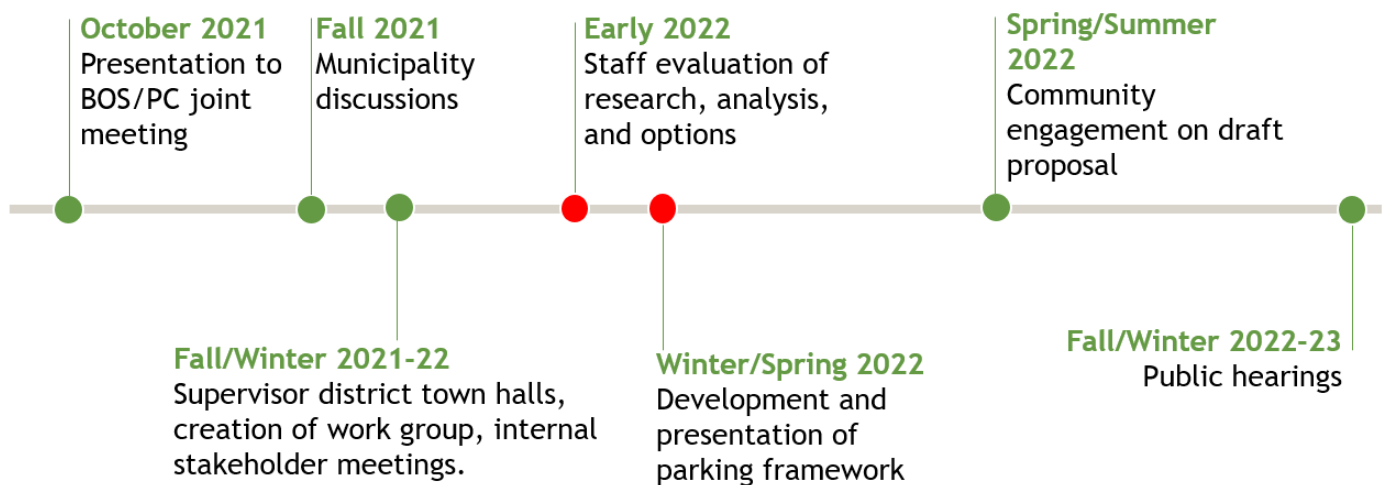
### **Parking Lot Landscaping**

During the engagement process community members expressed the desire to provide a direct environmental benefit for the reduction of parking. Impervious surfaces can cause environmental impacts such as the creation of urban heat islands and increased stormwater runoff. Impervious surfaces generate approximately two to three times the amount of stormwater runoff as greenspaces. It was suggested that an increase in the requirement for the provision of parking lot landscaping be evaluated. The Zoning Ordinance includes requirements for interior and peripheral parking lot landscaping which is separate from the transitional screening requirements. Interior parking lot landscaping is required for any parking lot with 20 or more spaces. The landscaping is to be primarily shade trees and must cover at least five percent of the total area of the parking lot. The landscaping should be dispersed to provide maximum shade for the vehicles. The dimensions of the planting area must comply with the Public Facilities Manual. Peripheral parking lot landscaping is also required for parking lots with 20 or more spaces but is only needed where transitional screening is not required. A comprehensive review of landscaping and screening standards to include parking lot landscaping is a Priority 1 item on the Zoning Ordinance Work Program. This topic will require substantial research, collaboration, and outreach. It is anticipated that a separate work group will be formed, and the issue will be addressed by a separate amendment.



## Project Timeline

The project team is currently in the process of developing, evaluating, and presenting the proposed conceptual framework for initial review. Our current timeline is shown below in red. If this conceptual framework is supported, the project team will begin formalizing a draft amendment proposal for community review and comment. Community engagement on a draft proposal is scheduled to begin later this spring and will include further meetings with the Board, Board Advisory Committees, community groups, industry groups and continued collaboration with impacted County agencies. The project team will use the existing project webpage and listserv to keep the community updated on engagement opportunities. It is the intent to form a final draft proposal which could be presented to the Board for authorization, and to schedule public hearings at the end of this year and early next year.



## Questions

If you have questions or comments about this project, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Davis, Parking Program Manager with Land Development Services, William Mayland, Deputy Zoning Administrator or Austin Gastrell, Planner with the Department of Planning and Development at [DPDLDSParkingAmendment@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:DPDLDSParkingAmendment@fairfaxcounty.gov) or visit the project website at [Parking Reimagined](#). If you would like to receive email updates about this project, please visit the project website and click “Add Me to the [Zoning Ordinance Information and Amendment List Serve](#).” You may follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/fairfaxcountyzoning/>.