

OPEN OPTION PARKING



Edmonton

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Parking is a powerful, but often hidden, force that shapes how our communities are designed, how properties are developed and the way residents move around the city. Like many North American cities, Edmonton introduced minimum parking requirements into its zoning bylaw in the 1960s and has used them ever since. Parking minimums effectively ensure that the highest parking needs are provided on-site. This means that, by design, most spaces are empty through the year and that the land and costs associated with the provision of these empty spaces have shaped the city's development.

As Edmonton has grown in size and population, it has shifted its aspirations to being a more equitable city, where amenities, housing and jobs will be part of each neighbourhood. As the City took steps to achieve these outcomes, it was apparent that parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw were impeding the City's own achievement of these goals. The largely underused or empty parking lots, which were being developed due to parking minimums, created safety concerns for active transportation users who passed by them. They also reduced the vibrancy of areas, breaking up the urban interface. Often they were unlandscaped and created a visual blight. And, for a

City with large goals and expenses, these parcels of land generated little tax revenue and often dampened any advancements for revitalizing areas.

In addition to impeding the City's own vision for its future, parking minimums were identified as a barrier and extra cost for development. In some cases, the costs associated with meeting the required parking minimums determined if it was cost effective to advance a proposal. In other cases the minimums limited building heights as underground parking costs didn't deliver a return on investment. For applicants, parking studies added time and cost to a project and could create uncertainty if the parking provision was appealed. The cost to review parking and attend appeals was also shared by the City and created uncertainty for the development community.

For Edmontonians, parking provision sometimes changed how spaces were accessed. With an overabundance of parking across the City, there was little reason to use other modes of transportation. This singular focus for access also meant that many times Edmontonians chose not to access certain spaces if there was a fear that parking provision was limited – regardless of whether this was perception

or reality. It was clear that trying to determine the parking requirements through a set formula was creating both on-site and city wide challenges.

In 2020, Edmonton approved an Open Option Parking approach which sought to rectify many of the issues.

Open Option Parking means treating parking spaces as market goods, rather than a regulated amenity.

Open Option Parking removes the regulation of providing parking from the Zoning Bylaw and instead allows parking demand to be determined and met by developers, businesses and landowners. It also allows for parking spaces to be shared between users and sets out the rules and regulations for when parking is provided. Finally, it prioritized the provision of accessible parking spaces on-site over other forms of parking, providing a more equitable approach to parking provision. The sum of these shifts is an on-site parking approach that better supports the goals and aspirations for Edmonton, as laid out in the City's then-emerging new Municipal Development Plan – The City Plan.

As a planning project, Open Option Parking fundamentally shifted the way on-site parking provision occurs as it is no longer governed through the Zoning Bylaw. **Edmonton was the first major Canadian city to take such a large step in moving away from regulating parking.** A bold move was needed to help begin the rebalancing of land use in the city. Small steps and the erosion of regulation would not have created an environment for large scale change to happen and would have perpetuated continued oversupply, albeit at a slower rate.

Designing a city around parking instead of people can result in wasted space and overlooked business opportunities. **Open Option Parking makes space and creates opportunities. It increases flexibility for site development, better enabling different forms and uses to be developed.**

Open Option Parking creates choice and value. It better accounts for the true cost of parking provision and informs people about the cost of parking and travel choices. The project introduced the concept of tradeoffs between parking supply and urban built form and sought feedback on the overall outcomes

people wanted to achieve. It highlighted that there was a desire for choice, both for parking provision but also for different modal options and development types across the community. In creating parking, there is support for a shift towards valuing other modes of transportation beyond the automobile.

Open Option Parking supports a more sustainable future. It recognizes that land value and supply cannot solely dictate our community shape. The costs of operation and long term health, social, equity and economic opportunities must form part of our city building. By no longer assuming that the private vehicle must be accounted for in each and every development, there are opportunities to support other forms of transportation and development types. And while accessible parking remains prioritized, Open Option Parking recognizes that not everyone has the same needs or wants, and that each site can be developed to be calibrated accordingly.

Open Option Parking has also enabled Edmonton to begin looking at how it manages other aspects of parking. This includes recalibrating the vast network of on-street public parking spaces through the advancement of a (draft) Public Parking Action Plan. The Action Plan looks to manage parking and curbside space as a strategic asset and develop a connected mobility system that supports various modes of transportation. It acknowledges that there is growing demand for mode share supports and other innovative ideas, and parking spaces offer an opportunity to support and enable these uses.

Open Option Parking is both a regulatory and transformative change. It has the potential to deliver significant long term benefits for Edmonton, offering choice and flexibility while supporting cost savings and efficiencies for development. It is an innovative step that will help the city become the one that Edmontonians want and envision through The City Plan. Edmonton has led the way in changing how we think about parking spaces, both on-site and on-street, making space for future opportunities to occur.