



DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING  
RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**City Planning Commission**

**Date:** October 24, 2019

**Time:** After 8:30 A.M.

**Place:** Van Nuys City Council Chamber  
14410 Sylvan Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Van Nuys, CA 91401

**Plan Area:** Citywide

**PUBLIC HEARING:** Required

**PROPOSED PROJECT:** Update of Advisory Notice Relative to Above-Grade Parking

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

1. **Endorse** the Advisory Notice to Applicants Relative to Above-Grade Parking, Attached as Exhibit A.

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP  
Director of Planning

Arthi Varma, AICP  
Deputy Director

Ken Bernstein, AICP  
Principal City Planner

Claire Bowin  
Senior City Planner

Danai Zaire, 213.847.3709  
Associate City Planner

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Project Analysis.....</b>	<b>A-1</b>
Summary .....	A-1
Background .....	A-1
Discussion .....	A-2
Conclusion.....	A-2

### **Exhibit (Attached)**

A. Advisory Notice Relative to Above-Grade Parking

## Summary

Over the last several months, the City Planning Commission has expressed concerns about the impact of above-grade parking on the pedestrian experience. This concern can be ameliorated when the above-grade parking is “wrapped” or “lined” with active uses or concealed with architectural features, in other instances the parking is prominently visible and does not enhance the public realm or improve the pedestrian environment. To address these concerns the Commission, on May 30, 2019, established an above-grade parking sub-committee and directed the Department to update the Above-Grade Parking Advisory. The updated advisory is meant to provide applicants with greater clarity, from the outset of the design process, regarding the Commission’s intent with regards to above-grade parking design.

## Background

On October 27, 2016 the City Planning Commission endorsed the existing Advisory Notice Relative to Above-Grade Parking. The notice was intended to serve not as a new policy, guideline, or plan but rather as an informational document to call attention to the many existing goals, objectives, policies and programs in the City’s General Plan that address the design of above-grade parking. The accompanying staff report also laid out a number of follow-up actions intended to provide further guidance on the design and extent of above-grade podium parking. The follow-up action items included a recommendation to explore the feasibility of counting above-grade parking towards a project’s floor area ratio calculation, to update the Citywide and Downtown Design Guidelines, and to consider reducing parking requirements in areas well served by transit.

As a result of these recommendations a number of the Department’s current work efforts have focused on these topic areas. The Department has recently completed a draft update to the Citywide Design Guidelines, to be considered by the City Planning Commission at its October 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, and a number of the “best practices” provide guidance on above-grade parking. The Downtown Design Guidelines are being updated as part of the Downtown Community Plan and will also include additional guidance as to the treatment of above-grade parking. The recently-released draft Downtown Community Plan update includes a draft proposal to count above-grade parking towards the calculation of floor area.

In addition, the Department’s on-going update to the City’s zoning code is expected to include a number of parking strategies that can be tailored to the specific character of the City’s many unique neighborhoods. These strategies will include a variety of parking standards that acknowledge the reduced need for parking in locations well-served by frequent, high-quality transit, like Downtown Los Angeles while also valuing the need for more plentiful parking in less urban areas of the City. The zoning code update will also include a number of above-grade parking design standards that will be tailored to reflect the varying character of the City’s many neighborhoods. In some locations above-grade parking could be required to be “lined” where in others a “opaque screen” that visually reduces the appearance of the parking may be sufficient. Areas with a high level of pedestrian activity will likely be held to a higher design expectation than areas where vehicular and/or industrial activity is more common.

## **Discussion**

### *Above-Grade Parking Advisory Subcommittee*

The Commission's Above-Grade Parking Advisory sub-committee held three meetings with Department staff to discuss the challenges of above-grade parking and explore opportunities for strengthening the Commission's design intent with regards to new above-grade parking. The second meeting included the Mayor's Chief Design Officer, Christopher Hawthorne, along with a number of architects, developers and builders with relevant experience in designing and/or constructing above-grade parking structures. The group provided helpful insights into the constraints that a development team often confronts, including the influence of the City's parking standards on design and massing, the geological and/or financial considerations that can impede locating parking below-ground, and the financial and environmental implications of mechanically ventilating the parking when it is placed below-grade or fully enclosed.

### *Proposed Advisory Notice*

As a result of these meetings, the Department has prepared an update to the Above-Grade Parking Advisory Notice. The update recognizes the adverse influence that above-grade parking can have on a community while also acknowledging the challenges that development teams often encounter when incorporating required parking spaces into a constrained site.

The updated notice first lays out a rationale for heightened scrutiny of above-grade parking, based upon the three design approaches that are the cornerstone of the update to the Citywide Design Guidelines. The notice's background section articulates how well-designed above-grade parking can enhance the public realm and protect the pedestrian environment.

Second, the notice lays out two Priority Parking Strategies that direct applicants first to pursue available zoning tools and incentives to reduce the amount of parking provided, and second, to place all project parking below ground.

Where below-ground parking is not feasible, the notice provides a series of Above-Grade Parking Design Strategies that focus on the importance of integrating the parking into the design and form of the project, and minimizing the visibility of the parking. The design strategies also emphasize the value of designing the garage so that the parking can be adaptively reused in the future. And lastly, the strategies encourage parking structures with a top deck to incorporate green roofs, solar panels or open space amenities.

Projects that do include above-grade parking are instructed to meet with the Department's Urban Design Studio. This added design review will allow the Department to engage directly with the development team to better understand project constraints while also facilitating design solutions that reinforce City policy goals.

## **Conclusion**

The Department recommends the Commission endorse the proposed Advisory Notice, in order to strengthen and clarify the Commission's expectations for how above-grade parking may contribute to a more harmonious urban form and a vital and engaging public realm.

**DEPARTMENT OF  
CITY PLANNING**

COMMISSION OFFICE  
(213) 978-1300

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

SAMANTHA MILLMAN  
PRESIDENT

VAHID KHORSAND  
VICE-PRESIDENT

DAVID H. J. AMBROZ  
CAROLINE CHOE  
HELEN LEUNG  
KAREN MACK  
MARC MITCHELL  
VERONICA PADILLA-CAMPOS  
DANA M. PERLMAN

**CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
CALIFORNIA**



ERIC GARCETTI  
MAYOR

**EXECUTIVE OFFICES**

200 N. SPRING STREET, ROOM 525  
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012-4801  
(213) 978-1271

VINCENT P. BERTONI, AICP  
DIRECTOR

KEVIN J. KELLER, AICP  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SHANA M.M. BONSTIN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

TRICIA KEANE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

ARTHI L. VARMA, AICP  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

LISA M. WEBBER, AICP  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

**EXHIBIT A  
ADVISORY NOTICE RELATIVE TO ABOVE-GRADE PARKING**

TO: PROJECT APPLICANTS WITH ABOVE-GRADE PARKING  
FROM: THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
EFFECTIVE DATE:

**APPLICABILITY AND INTENT OF THIS NOTICE:**

This notice serves to advise applicants of the Commission's concerns on the potential impact that parking facilities, and especially above-grade parking, can have on the quality of the public realm and the pedestrian environment. To address these concerns, the Commission has outlined below a set of strategies, for projects that include above-grade parking, that should be considered during the project design phase.

**BACKGROUND:**

As Los Angeles transitions from an auto-oriented metropolis to a more transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly city, few design features can so easily detract from a vibrant public realm as above-grade parking. Parking podium design demands concerted attention from the Commission to make structured parking consistent with the City's three design approaches that serve as the basis for the updated Citywide Design Guidelines: Pedestrian-First Design, 360 Degree Design, and Climate-Adapted Design.

- Pedestrian-First Design | Project designs should be configured to promote an active public realm with "eyes on the street" to enhance safety, economic vitality, and the quality of public space. Parking podiums physically separate residents and commercial users, do not promote an active street, and detract from the ability of pedestrians to fully engage with more active uses in the built environment. Multiple curb cuts and driveways to access above-grade garages interrupt safe sidewalk paths for pedestrians, compromising the City's goal to eliminate pedestrian fatalities and collisions.

- 360 Degree Design | All sides of a building matter and new projects should thoughtfully relate to their surrounding context, in all directions. Exposed parking podium levels may negatively impact neighboring uses, directing views of car headlights and noise from turning movements into nearby residences or businesses. Above-grade and podium-style parking has also often resulted in blank facades that can appear as a single uninviting mass, creating an imposing visual relationship to its surrounding community.
- Climate-Adapted Design | The design of above-grade parking facilities should carefully consider energy performance, the unique Mediterranean climate of Southern California, and future adaptability to other uses. Design treatments that reduce visual impacts of parking, such as fully enclosing above-grade garages, may involve environmental trade-offs by requiring mechanical ventilation.

In particular, to help address the updated Citywide Design Guideline #5, “Express a clear and coherent architectural idea,” the spatial mass of structured parking should also be incorporated into a project’s design in a way that it becomes a cohesive element of the overall design strategy. Parking podiums that are wider and/or deeper than a project’s overall structure can draw undesired visual attention to the parking and undermine the public realm.

**DIRECTION FOR PROJECT APPLICANTS:**

The strategies described below shall be used to guide applicants during project development with respect to the extent, placement, design, and environmental performance of all on-site parking. Particular attention should be given to ensure that projects are designed in a uniform and cohesive manner, inclusive of any parking elements.

**Priority Parking Strategies:**

1. Minimize the amount of parking provided, utilizing available zoning tools and incentives, including Density Bonus incentives, Transit Oriented Communities incentives, and the City’s bicycle parking ordinance. Consider automated parking as a tool to reduce the amount of physical space required by the parking.
2. Place all project parking below ground.

**Above-Grade Parking Design Strategies:**

All projects that include above-grade parking will be reviewed by the Department of City Planning’s Urban Design Studio for design feedback. The Project Planner shall share the

feedback with the applicant team. The application of the following strategies will be evaluated:

- Fully integrate parking into the design and form of the project. The parking should reflect the overall design intent of the project and should not be recognizable as parking during either day or nighttime hours.
- Minimize the visibility of parking:
  - Buffer parking from view by wrapping the parking with active uses such as office and/or residential spaces. On larger sites with multiple buildings, isolate the parking in a single stand-alone structure internal to the site, surrounded by other uses.
  - Where it is not possible or desirable to wrap the parking with active uses (e.g., due to proximity to a freeway, an industrial use, or alley), the parking should not be expressed as a separate element but instead should be concealed with visually opaque materials or treatments.
- To facilitate the future adaptive reuse of a parking garage, incorporate flat floor levels along with the future structural needs and potential floor-to-ceiling heights when designing and engineering parking garages.
- If a parking structure has a top deck, incorporate green roofs, solar panels, or open space amenities.