

## Market-Driven Parking Supply Can Help Colorado Families

**EMILY HAMILTON**

*Senior Research Fellow, Urbanity Project, Mercatus Center at George Mason University*

Colorado Senate, Local Government and Housing Committee  
HB24-1304 Minimum Parking Requirements

April 25, 2024

Thank you Chair Exum, Vice Chair Gonzales, and members of the committee. I am Emily Hamilton, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, where I am codirector of the Urbanity Project. I am also a Colorado native, born and raised in Grand Junction.

When parking mandates require developers to dedicate more real estate to parking than they otherwise would, housing costs go up and our cities become increasingly spread out. These parking rules also impede transportation, making it more difficult for people to get around on foot, bicycle, or public transit. Allowing developers to decide how much parking to build based on market demand would encourage more types of new construction, including both more housing in existing walkable neighborhoods and more walkable greenfield development. The text of House Bill 24-1304 ably summarizes research on the consequences of parking requirements for housing affordability, transportation choices, and environmental impacts.

We have seen that where local policymakers have eliminated parking mandates, real estate developers have still provided needed off-street parking, because most Americans drive and are willing to pay for convenient car storage. However, some subsets of the population have different transportation preferences and patterns. Local parking mandates homogenize development, preventing the market from serving people with a wide range of needs and tastes for housing and transportation. Three types of Coloradans would benefit from opportunities to live in places with less parking:

1. Single parents
2. People who prefer walkability to driveability
3. Children and adults who cannot drive

### 1. Benefits to Single Parents

Across Colorado and the United States as a whole, parking mandates for multifamily housing generally vary depending on the number of bedrooms per unit. For example, in Grand Junction, a one-bedroom

For more information or to meet with the scholar, contact  
Mercatus Outreach, 703-993-4930, [mercatusoutreach@mercatus.gmu.edu](mailto:mercatusoutreach@mercatus.gmu.edu)  
Mercatus Center at George Mason University, 3434 Washington Blvd., 4th Floor, Arlington, Virginia 22201

*The ideas presented in this document do not represent official positions of the Mercatus Center or George Mason University.*

apartment must have one off-street parking spot, a two-bedroom apartment must have one and a half, and an apartment with three or more bedrooms must have two.

In cases where couples or roommates live in an apartment with more than one bedroom, higher parking mandates may reflect higher car ownership and car storage that renters value. However, when one or more of the bedrooms is for children, who do not have cars, these higher parking mandates burden renters and force them to pay higher housing costs that include the cost of unused parking spots. In Denver, where one-quarter of single-parent households live in multifamily housing and have either one car or no car,<sup>1</sup> parking mandates often take away a household's option to only pay for the parking they use.

## 2. Parking and Walkability

People have a wide range of neighborhood preferences—some residents prioritize space and quiet while others prioritize proximity and convenience. Land use regulations like parking requirements prevent the market from serving these diverse preferences. A recent Pew survey found most adults in the US prefer to live in a large house, with schools, stores, and restaurants driving distance away. However, 42 percent of respondents said they would prefer to live in a neighborhood with smaller houses spaced closer together, with schools, stores, and restaurants within walking distance.<sup>2</sup>

While walkability may be the preference of a minority of adults, these people are highly underserved in Colorado today. We can see this in Fort Collins where, if we apply the national walkability preference of 42 percent, we would expect about 60,000 residents to prefer walkability to more space. However, only about 6,000 Fort Collins residents live in walkable neighborhoods,<sup>3</sup> in part because parking requirements and other land use regulations prevent the market from delivering walkable options. Allowing the market to provide more types of development, including more variation in the quantity of parking paired with new commercial developments and new housing, would put Colorado on a path toward more people living in places that reflect their preferences.

## 3. Parking Mandates Harm People Who Can Not Drive

One subset of people likely to have a higher preference for walkability includes people who cannot drive due to their age or disability. More than one million Coloradans—nearly one-fifth of the state's population—are under the age of 16.<sup>4</sup> As land use regulations and economic trends have led to more families living in less walkable places, children have become increasingly reliant on their parents to drive them where they need and want to go. While nearly half of kids walked or biked to school in 1969, only one-tenth do today.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2022, via Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rogers, and Megan Schouweiler, IPUMS USA: Version 14.0 (dataset), Minneapolis, MN, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V14.0>.

<sup>2</sup> Ted Van Green, "Majority of Americans Prefer a Community with Big Houses, Even If Local Amenities Are Farther Away," Pew Research Center, August 2, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Walk Score, "Living in Fort Collins," accessed April 22, 2024, [https://www.walkscore.com/CO/Fort\\_Collins](https://www.walkscore.com/CO/Fort_Collins).

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey 2022, IPUMS US, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Highway Administration, "National Household Travel Survey," 2022, last modified December 22, 2023, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/nhts.cfm>.

Critics of this trend point out that children’s increased dependence on their parents to move around their environment may have negative consequences for their physical and mental health.<sup>6</sup> A growing share of parents is seeking to raise their kids in an environment where the kids have the freedom to move throughout their neighborhoods and cities more independently, similar to the children of the Baby Boomer or Gen X generations. However, raising “free range” children requires families to live where children have access to destinations without driving. Many families struggle to find housing in walkable, bikeable neighborhoods in their cities at prices they can afford.

At the other end of the age spectrum, a growing number of elderly Americans can no longer drive or have chosen to stop driving. Due to the mobility needs of this population, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) is an important advocate for places that are safe and pleasant for people who get around on foot. Parking requirements stand in the way of this objective when they lead to long and unpleasant walks between destinations.

## Conclusion

It is well documented that parking mandates increase housing costs and lead people to drive more and use other forms of transportation less. In particular, rules that prevent developers from providing housing and neighborhoods with little parking have particularly burdensome consequences for people who have few cars or do not drive at all. Some of these residents include single parents, people who have a strong preference for living in a walkable environment, and people who cannot drive because of their age or disability. Allowing the market to serve these groups would allow them to economize on parking and live in places that better meet their needs.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024); Timothy P. Carney, *Family Unfriendly: How Our Culture Made Raising Kids Much Harder Than It Needs to Be* (New York: Harper Collins, 2024); Lenore Skenazy, *Free-Range Kids: How Parents and Teachers Can Let Go and Let Grow* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2021).