

# NEW URBAN NEWS

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## Choice Neighborhoods: HUD's new urban remedy takes shape

*Breathtakingly broad in scope, the Obama administration's redevelopment plan tackles nearly every problem known to afflict city-dwellers.*

One of the brightest pieces of urban planning news this year has been the roll-out of the Obama administration's Choice Neighborhoods program.

Last March the US Department of Housing & Urban Development awarded Choice Neighborhoods planning grants of up to \$250,000 each to 17 communities across the country. In August, bigger money began to flow: five "implementation grants" of \$10.3 million to \$30.5 million, aimed at helping to turn around blighted sections of Boston, New Orleans, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Choice Neighborhoods takes the ambitions that were at the heart of the HOPE VI public housing redevelopment program and raises them to a new level. Though the total federal funding available through Choice Neighborhoods is only a fraction of what HOPE VI distributed at its peak, the new program tries to grapple with a greater array of entrenched social problems.

In the five cities chosen for a total of \$122.3 million in implementation grants, HUD's goal is not only to replace or renovate troubled housing developments — a considerable undertaking in itself — but also to help set the distressed surrounding community onto a productive course.

Thus the plan for reviving part of the Woodlawn section of Chicago includes a substantial physical component:

- Demolish all 504 units of a dilapidated Section 8 housing development known as Grove Parc.
- Construct approximately 210 new Section 8 units on parts of the 12-acre Grove Parc site.
- Construct nearly 300 Section 8 units in the surrounding neighborhood.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

**Schooner Bay home looks across the restored dune to the sea — see story on page 10 about how ecological practices are adding up to hundreds of millions in savings for new Bahamas town.**



PHOTO BY STEVE MULLON

## Parking reform gathers speed, especially in the West

*An updated edition of Donald Shoup's *The High Cost of Free Parking* tells how to introduce "performance parking" systems and other innovations.*

PHILIP LANGDON

In 2005, Donald Shoup won wide attention with *The High Cost of Free Parking*, 752 pages presenting the most important rethinking of North American parking policies in many years. Now the UCLA planning professor has followed up with a new edition that contains all the material in the original book, plus 56 pages telling how cities and towns have begun putting his ideas into practice.

In the first edition, Shoup argued that conventional approaches to parking have produced too many parking

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

### INSIDE

*The House vs. Obama*, PAGE 2

*West Virginia town assembles an impressive team*, PAGES 4, 14

*Auto-oriented and transit-oriented parking policy*, PAGE 7

*How Bothell, WA, is repairing sprawl*, PAGES 8-9, 12

*The ecological dividend*, PAGES 10-12

*What to do with a cul-de-sac?* PAGES 13-14

*New Urban Update*, PAGES 15-17, 20

*CNU Update*, PAGES 18-19

*Grapevine*, PAGE 20

# Parking reform

FROM PAGE 1

lots and generated too much traffic congestion, undermining the appeal of urban centers. He urged cities to adopt a different method: adjust the price of on-street parking continually so that the price accurately reflects demand.

In the new sections of the \$34.95 paperback edition (from the American Planning Association's Planners Press), Shoup explores how communities are implementing his three principal prescriptions:

- Set the right price for curbside parking.
- Use some of the parking revenue to pay for public services in the areas where the money is collected.
- Remove minimum parking requirements.

## CURBSIDE PARKING RATES

Many of the municipalities carrying out Shoup's ideas are on the West Coast. He focuses attention particularly on San Francisco, which, aided by a \$19.8 million Urban Partnership Program grant from the US Department of Transportation, "has embarked on an ambitious program, called SFpark, to get the prices of curbside parking right."

The SFpark pilot program was launched in 2010 by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency by embedding sensors in the pavement of parking spaces. By late this summer, 8,200 of the city's 28,800 metered spaces were equipped with sensors — wireless devices about the size of a hockey puck, which tell the agency which spaces have vehicles parked on them.

If the sensors reveal that the spaces on a particular block are filled all the time, that's a signal to raise prices on that block. If many spaces remain empty much of the time, that's a signal to reduce prices.

Using data from the sensors, the agency adjusts parking prices in several areas of the city as frequently as once a month. The first rate adjustments took effect late this July, establishing prices of \$1.75 to \$3.75 an hour in eight areas: Civic Center, Hayes Valley, the Financial District, SoMa, the Mission, Fisherman's Wharf, Fillmore, and the Marina District.

The goal, Shoup says in his book, is "to set the lowest price that will yield



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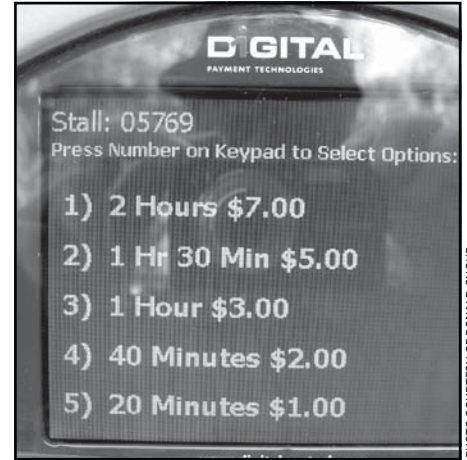


PHOTO COURTESY OF DONALD SHOUP

Smart meter, above left, accepts cards. Above right, a display of variable prices.

one or two open spaces on every block." That typically means an occupancy level of 85 percent on each block. Shoup reasons that this provides enough empty spaces so that each motorist will find a spot quickly, cutting down on cruising for parking spots — a source of traffic congestion and air pollution. SFpark chose a somewhat lower occupancy goal: 60 to 80 percent, which should ease the parking search dramatically.

Meters can be programmed to charge different prices at different times of the day and to charge different prices on weekends — all reflecting demonstrated demand. (The pilot program, which runs to the summer of 2012, also regulates 12,500 spaces in 15 agency-managed parking garages.)

Motorists find the rates posted on the meters and at the agency's website (SFpark.org) and also on a free SFpark iPhone app. Locations of vacant spaces also can be found via the website and the phone app.

Other cities, including Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, and Washington, DC, have adopted similar rate-setting systems — Shoup calls them "performance parking policies."

San Francisco's system encountered opposition from people who considered it a burden on workers, small businesses, and the poor. Shoup regards such opposition as misguided. "The poorest people cannot afford cars," he says, "but they can benefit from public services — such as public transportation — that are financed by parking revenues." He maintains that variably-priced parking results in on-street spaces being better used and more available, which should benefit most businesses.

## MANY BENEFITS

"We don't yet have all of the numbers in on the costs and benefits of installing parking occupancy sensors," says Patrick Siegman, a principal at Nelson \ Nygaard Consulting Associates, which advised San Francisco on its parking system. "However, from what we've seen so far, I feel pretty confident that parking occupancy sensors will prove to be a highly cost-effective investment for many cities" — especially in downtowns, Main Street districts, and transit-oriented developments.

A combination of wirelessly-networked sensors, meters, and smart phones can do for parking enforcement officers what fish-finding sonar does for fishing boats, Siegman suggests. It will tell officers where the violators are. The labor cost of parking enforcement will be reduced. "Many parking districts generate more than \$2,000 per space per year in revenue," Siegman says, "so there is real money at stake here."

"We expect meter revenue to increase as a result of SFpark," says Paul Rose, spokesman for the San Francisco transportation agency. However, he says, parking tickets will probably decrease, partly because the city has extended its limits on how long a vehicle can occupy a space.

Data from this kind of system can help cities avoid constructing too much parking. "In many cities," Siegman says, "we've seen unnecessary parking lots and parking structures built because city leaders perceived there to be an overall parking shortage, when in fact the real problem was overcrowded curbside parking and underused off-street parking."



Advances in technology will make such programs feasible in more and more cities, Shoup predicts. Miniaturization, for example, “allows even single-space meters to offer sophisticated features such as variable prices, remote updates, payment by credit card, and solar power.”

“Cities should move forward with setting parking availability targets and adjusting prices to achieve those targets even before they get sensor technology,” says Jeffrey Tumlin, another principal at Nelson\Nygaard.

Even more important than sensors are “parking payment technologies that make it simple to pay for parking,” Tumlin says, asserting, “Customers should never be expected to carry quarters with them.” By the end of this year, parkers in San Francisco will be able to pay by credit card (through the Internet or Pay-by-Phone). If a motorist can’t get back to the meter before it expires, a text message can be sent to the motorist’s iPhone, alerting the parker to add time to the meter remotely. Rose thinks the easier payment options will reduce the number of tickets issued.

Redwood City, a community of 77,000, south of San Francisco, adopted a performance parking policy in 2006. Rather than installing sensors, Redwood City has required its parking manager to survey the average occupancy of each parking area in its downtown meter zone periodically. One way or another, a municipality has to measure the occupancy levels to determine the proper rates.

**OVERCOMING RESISTANCE**

In many locales, people oppose higher parking rates — or installation of meters to begin with. A good way to overcome such resistance, Shoup says, is to promise that some of the parking revenue will be dedicated to public services and improvements in the immediate area.

“Old Pasadena, a historic business district in Pasadena, California, is the leading example of a battered area that dramatically improved after the city used parking meter revenue to finance added public services,” he reports. “Spending more than \$1 million a year of meter money on new public services helped convert what had been a commercial skid row into one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southern



PHOTO COURTESY OF FREEDMAN TUNG, SASAKI

**Cafe seating in a parking space on Castro Street, Mountain View, California.**

California.”

“If meter money stays in the neighborhood, it will probably be spent on things the residents value highly,” Shoup reasons. “And if new public spending in a neighborhood is financed by new revenue generated in that neighborhood, residents in the rest of the city will probably find this spending more acceptable.”

In Old Pasadena, meters were installed in 1993 and authorized to operate even on Sundays and in the evenings, They provided a revenue source against which the city was able to borrow \$5 million to finance streetscape improvements and the conversion of previously unattractive alleys into handsome walkways with access to shops and restaurants. “The parking enforcement officers who monitor the meters until well into the night are official ‘eyes on the street,’ and their presence further increases security,” he says.

Other cities that earmark revenue from curb parking to paying for public services in the metered districts include Austin, Texas; St. Louis; Ventura, California; and Washington, DC. In 2008, Washington established a performance parking pilot project near a new ballpark (Nationals Park) that has 41,000 seats but only 1,300 off-street parking spaces. The city returns 75 percent of the meter revenue to the metered neighborhoods to make nonautomobile transportation improvements.

New York has established performance parking programs since 2008 in three areas: Greenwich Village; Park Slope, Brooklyn; and Manhattan’s Upper East Side. In 2010, Seattle authorized a system aimed at achieving approximately one or two open spaces per block face throughout the day. The move won strong support from business groups, Shoup says, because the city will no longer set rates solely to increase revenue from the meters. In both New York and Seattle, the new parking policies were initiated without returning any of the resulting revenue to the areas in which the money is being raised

**REMOVING MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS**

Governments make a big mistake when they require businesses to provide a specific quantity of off-street parking spaces, says Shoup. A recent study in Los Angeles County found that the last space added to a building’s parking supply cost \$7,500 more than it added to the building’s value.

“For service retail, such as restaurants with high parking requirements, the last parking space added \$14,700 more to a building’s cost than it added to the building’s value,” he reports. “Minimum parking requirements thus place a heavy economic burden on development by forcing developers to provide parking spaces that lose money.” Shoup recommends eliminating minimum

parking requirements.

A few cities, he notes, “have recently discovered that curb parking spaces can be far more valuable for outdoor cafes than for storing cars. Mountain View, California, became one of the first cities to allow outdoor cafes to occupy parking lanes, and the program has become very popular.” A restaurant expanding into the parking lane must pay the city \$600 per parking space per year.

“In 2010, New York City and San Francisco began to allow similar cafes in curb spaces,” Shoup says, adding, “An outdoor café in a curb space will employ more people, pay more taxes, and enliven a street far more than one parked car will.” During the winter, when outdoor dining is infeasible in a cold locale, cafes in curb spaces can be converted back to parking.

**BIKE PARKING, SOLAR POWER**

Parking lots are not going to disappear, Shoup acknowl-

edges, but cities might “amend their zoning codes to require solar power generation in the parking lots of large new buildings.” Google, he observes, “has installed ‘solar trees’ on its parking lots to provide 30 percent of its headquarters’ power demand.” He asserts: “If massive air conditioners for a new development significantly increase the risk of neighborhood power failure on hot summer days, requiring the developer to offset this risk seems reasonable.”

Municipalities are beginning to require parking for bicycles. Shoup recommends that developers be allowed to substitute bike parking spaces for required car parking spaces. “Grants Pass, Oregon, allows developers to substitute two covered bicycle parking spaces for one required car parking space, and four or more bicycle parking spaces for two required parking spaces,” he says. “Developers who want to provide fewer than the required number of car parking spaces will find bicycle parking spaces an attractive option.” ♦

**Auto-oriented, neutral, and transit-oriented parking policy**

*Transportation planner Patrick Siegman lays out three approaches to parking regulations in an attempt to move municipalities away from parking minimums.*

Most municipalities have codes with minimum off-street parking requirements. Many of these are also interested in sustainability and transit-oriented development — but they don’t know how to achieve these goals through their parking policies, according to transportation planner Patrick Siegman of Nelson \Nygaard Consulting Associates in San Francisco, California.

The technique Siegman has used is to present three alternative approaches, he told *New Urban News*:

1. *Auto-oriented planning: Minimum parking requirements are employed to make the city more auto-oriented than it would be if the matter was left up to the free market.*
2. *Neutral (a.k.a. laissez-faire) codes: Neither minimum nor maximum parking requirements are instituted.*
3. *Transit-oriented planning: No minimum parking requirements are used, but planners may use maximum parking requirements to help increase the market price of parking (reducing vehicle trips), and curb parking is carefully managed — using pricing and neighborhood parking benefit districts — to prevent curb parking shortages. Transit-oriented codes also frequently require the unbundling of parking costs from the cost of other goods and services, require the provision of free transit passes to building occupants, and include various other transportation demand management requirements.*

*We usually analyze how each approach will affect the community’s progress towards its own stated goals. Most cities list aspirations in their General Plan: more affordable housing, less pollution, less traffic congestion, and so on. It’s usually not hard to see that auto-oriented planning undermines progress toward those goals. As a result, quite a few of our clients have embraced plans that completely remove minimum parking requirements. It’s happening even in some pretty suburban places, like the City of Hayward, California. Even if a community doesn’t want to fully remove minimum parking*

*requirements, laying out these alternatives always seems to make the discussion easier. Once clients understand how to run a city without minimum parking requirements, it’s easy for them to see how they could reduce their existing parking requirements by half.*

*A compromise that frequently works is to adopt a set of interim parking requirements that are much lower than the old ones and that will sunset in a few years, so that the city has time to set up its curb parking management system. This is the approach we wound up using in Ventura, California. This change coincided with a new system of parking meters and residential parking permits. Now that those are in place, it really is possible to remove minimum parking requirements without generating any spillover problems.*

Siegman also has some clients in cities like San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Washington, DC, who are “pretty steadily removing minimum parking requirements from their codes, and often replacing them with maximum parking requirements.”

He objects to many form-based codes that still have minimum parking requirements. The SmartCode, for example, requires 2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of office in the center and core zones of a city, and 3 per 1,000 square feet elsewhere. The SmartCode also includes a shared parking formula, reductions for transit-oriented development, and allows on-street parking to count towards the requirements — so it promotes the reduction of minimum parking requirements. The Neighborhood Conservation Code, a version of the SmartCode for infill sites, includes no minimum parking requirements. <http://www.transect.org/codes.html>

But Siegman thinks the SmartCode could be rewritten to make it (1) more progressive and (2) politically astute, by including the three alternative approaches described above. “Once you put all three approaches in the recipe book, and clearly explain how each one works and what its consequences are, you wind up with a code that has far broader appeal and far greater applicability.”