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## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: March 19, 2024

Re: Parking Study

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Attached is the Parking Study Executive Summary. This document describes how we conducted the Parking Study, what we heard during community engagement, different needs we need to balance, and the City's planning goals. The complete list of final recommended strategies and action are included, along with five priority actions.

To read the full report, please visit: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/parkingstudy>.

# City of Cambridge Parking Study – 2022

## Executive Summary

The City of Cambridge conducted a [parking study](#) about how people use car parking. The purpose was to evaluate how well parking policies and regulations for cars support both community needs and City goals. The parking regulations we considered in this study were the Zoning Ordinance, the Parking and Transportation Demand Management Ordinance (PTDM), the Commercial Parking Ordinance (parking available to the public for a fee), the Resident Parking Permit Program, and Cambridge Traffic Regulations.

## How Did We Conduct This Study?

We listened to the needs and transportation experiences of more than 2,830 people from fall 2021 through 2022. The community engagement process included one-to-one personal connections, two surveys, tabling, pop-up conversations, emails, and interviews with residents, property owners, business owners, and employees. We also conducted an online transportation and parking survey.

City staff concentrated time and resources on reaching people who have barriers to participating in planning processes and whose needs and opinions may not have been heard in past discussions about parking policy. We conducted eight focus groups with a total of 90 participants. Five of the focus groups were in languages other than English and one was done with the American-born Black community. The Department of Human Service Programs' Community Engagement Team hosted focus groups with the American-born Black community, Bangla-speaking community, Haitian-Creole-speaking community, Arabic-speaking community, Spanish-speaking community, and the Amharic-speaking community. Staff also met with the Board of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities. Then we followed up by sending a summary of comments back to the focus group participants to reflect back what we heard, invited corrections, and posted it on the project website.

We shared information with more than 1,400 people through email blasts to a Cambridge parking interest group, the City daily update, newsletters put out by the Community Development Department, neighborhood association listservs, community-based organizations serving Cambridge residents, and the Parking Study web page.

At least two points of outreach took place in languages other than English (a survey translated into four languages so CET outreach workers could support community members to answer the survey and the CET focus groups).

The engagement effort included 122 in-depth conversations and 2,690 survey responses.

## What We Heard

People expressed a variety of opinions ranging from “We need more parking” to “My life would improve if I had safer bike lanes” to “I can’t rely on the bus if I never know when it will show up.” You can see detailed comments from all the focus groups on the [Parking Study web page](#).

Despite differences of opinion, we heard these shared values throughout discussions with community members:

- **Community:** I need to be able to easily receive friends and family in my home. I want to feel closer to my community.
- **Trust:** I want to be involved in City decisions, even if it’s a difficult conversation, and even if we disagree.
- **Respect:** I expect people to treat me kindly, even if I choose to use different transportation options than they do.
- **Accountability:** I want everybody to be held accountable for their behavior on our streets.
- **Safety:** I need to feel safe from personal violence and traffic violence, no matter how I get around.
- **Predictability:** I need to know that I can easily and predictably navigate through City streets.

## Our Community’s Challenge: Balancing Everyone’s Needs

### **Transportation choices are highly personal.**

People choose how to travel based on their personal circumstances, but not everyone starts with the same set of choices. For example, some people depend on their cars to do their job, while other people do not. For many people it is difficult to own and drive a car because the cost is too high or they might have a disability that prevents them from being able to drive a car. For other people, it can be difficult to not own and drive a car because they live far from work, have a disability, or feel unsafe traveling another way.

### **Parking will always be a limited resource, with impacts on equity.**

There is only so much space for parking on Cambridge streets. Many of our neighborhoods were built before cars existed and evolved without much off-street parking. Many Cambridge residents live in apartments without driveways or off-street parking and rely on resident street parking. People with fewer choices feel the effects of limited parking more than people with more choices. The City can’t guarantee that everyone will find a parking spot exactly where and when they want it, at the price they want to pay. But we can help make the availability of parking more equitable for those who need it.

### **Parking serves different and changing needs.**

Many current policies focus on storing private vehicles of residents, employees, and retail customers. Based on what we heard in the focus groups, we also need to improve parking policies for visitors to people’s homes, self-employed Cambridge residents, people who receive deliveries, and more.

### **Parking policies affect Cambridge’s future, not just its present.**

The choices people make today aren’t necessarily the choices that they will make in the future. Policies that focus only on today’s transportation system might result in fewer choices available to future generations.

## Planning Goals

The [Envision Cambridge](#) citywide plan includes these mobility and climate goals:

- **Equity and Accessibility:** Ensure a diverse set of travel options that meet the access and mobility needs of people of all ages, abilities, and incomes.
- **Reliability and Efficiency:** Ensure people and goods can reliably move in and around Cambridge, and encourage space-efficient transportation choices like walking, biking, public transit, and carpooling.
- **Safe and Active Transportation:** Eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries while encouraging active living and improving comfort for people of all ages and abilities.
- **Connectedness and User-Friendliness:** Create an easy-to-understand, integrated, continuous, and comfortable transportation network for all people.
- **Community Character and Vitality:** Ensure that the city's transportation system supports shared community spaces and enhances neighborhood streets.
- **Climate Action:** Achieve carbon neutrality, including a carbon-neutral transportation system.
- **Climate Change Preparedness:** Protect the lives and livelihoods of the Cambridge community from the impacts of climate change.
- **Environmental Justice:** Ensure that all Cambridge residents are protected from environmental impacts and benefit equitably from environmental resources.

The City has described these goals in policies and plans that support people taking the bus and train, and walking, biking, and carpooling:

- [Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance](#)
- [Parking and Transportation Demand Management Ordinance](#)
- [Vision Zero Policy](#)
- [Complete Streets Policy](#)
- [Transit Strategic Plan](#)
- [Bicycle Plan](#)
- [Cycling Safety Ordinance](#)
- [School Wellness Policy](#)
- [Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Resilient Cambridge](#)
- [Net Zero Transportation Plan](#) (in development now)

## Final Recommended Strategies and Actions

The final recommendations contain 5 Strategies with 32 Actions. City staff have prioritized the following actions in response to themes we heard during the community engagement process. These priorities are:

### Use existing parking better

- Develop detailed zoning amendment recommendations to allow and encourage the use of existing underused accessory and principal use parking spaces where a loss of metered on-street spaces is anticipated.
- Create more parking for short stops of 30 minutes to 2 hours. Example: Convert some spaces to pickup and drop-off.

### Provide clear information to residents, business owners, and property owners

- Improve access to resources that answer common transportation questions, including:
  - decisions that led to today's transportation system
  - what's next
  - how to get around in new street infrastructure
  - parking available to the public
  - courtesy when getting around in all modes
  - how our parking rules work together
  - how do I use the parking meter payment app
  - who should clear snow in different areas

### Increase equity through parking and transportation policy changes

- Increase efforts to help connect people with existing programs that discount mobility options: income-eligible Bluebikes and MBTA discounts.

### Improve the experience of driving, parking, walking, biking, taking a bus and train, scooting, sharing a ride, and sharing a car

- Install bus priority projects on important bus routes (signal priority, queue jumps, or bus lanes).

The complete list of recommended actions in the appendix of this report includes: How the action responds to community engagement, a description of the current City rule or process, potential consequences the action could have, and priority<sup>1</sup>. Once we complete the initial high-priority actions, we will re-prioritize the medium priority actions.

[Use this link to download the FULL REPORT with Appendix.](#)

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<sup>1</sup> These priorities are based on our best understanding of community goals and staff workplans over the next decade. New and emerging priorities of the City Council and the community could modify timeframes or change the way we are able to complete the actions. **High priority actions in bold text, shaded in peach.**