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Land Use and Environmental Law 5206

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### Parking Minimum Reform, Lansing: A Transit Based Approach

The city of Lansing enforces a parking minimum for every category of zoning except its G-1 Core Business District. It spells out in great detail, in Chapter 1284, the ownership of said off-street spaces, the accessibility requirements, the minimums for a plethora of housing, commercial and industrial types, the design and dimension specifics, grading, drainage, lighting and finally, the variances allowed.

Lansing, Michigan – Code of Ordinances: Part 12, Title 6: Zoning, Chapter 1284.06 – Variances

#### **1284.06. - Variances.**

If the following conditions are met, the Board of Zoning Appeals may grant a variance to the minimum number of required off-street parking spaces:

(a) More than one type of use operates out of one structure, or more than one structure jointly uses the same off-street parking facility.

(b) The peak operating hours of each use do not overlap.

(Ord. No. 636, 3-7-83)

1983 Lansing was an automobile-dominated city, the nascent Capital Area Transit Authority (CATA) was merely a decade old and ran a limited service. Michigan's capital city had long been a champion of the automobile, where the world's first mass-produced car was manufactured at the headquarters of the Oldsmobile Automobile Company<sup>1</sup>. The city's governance reflected the economy of the city, shuttering its streetcar system in 1929 in favor of motorcoaches while embarking on an ambitious campaign to pave the city's hundreds of miles

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Domm, *Michigan Yesterday & Today* (Minneapolis, MN: MBI Pub. Co. LLC and Voyageur Press, 2009).

of roads and build new road connections over its rivers<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore no surprise to see Lansing take its parking minimums seriously, meticulously laying out the provisions for adequate parking spaces. After decades of economic growth centered around government, education, manufacturing and healthcare, the metropolitan region's 550,391 residents occupy a sprawling total area of over 160 square miles<sup>3</sup>, thanks in part to its automobile-centered planning strategies.

Citing a fear of street congestion caused by motorists' endless search for parking, the city authorized strict parking space minimum requirements for all residential, commercial, and industrial properties. These included regulations for all residences, from single-family detached homes to large multi-family complexes, and dictated the specific number of spaces for businesses such as barber shops (three for each of the first two chairs and one and one-half for each additional chair), bowling alleys (five per lane), and miniature golf courses (three per hole)<sup>4</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> Graydon M. Meints, *Michigan Railroads and Railroad Companies* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Lansing City, Michigan," Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/lansingcitymichigan>.

<sup>4</sup> Municode Library, April 10, 2020, [https://library.municode.com/mi/lansing/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=COOR\\_PT12PLZOCO\\_TIT6ZO\\_CH1284OREPA\\_1284.13SCRESP](https://library.municode.com/mi/lansing/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COOR_PT12PLZOCO_TIT6ZO_CH1284OREPA_1284.13SCRESP).



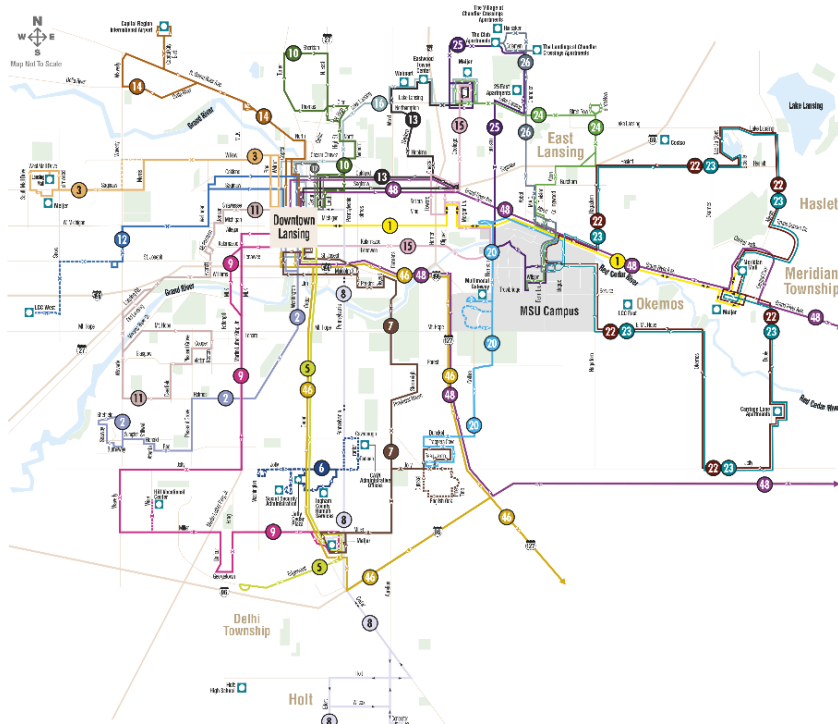
*Parking minimums plague both core commercial districts and outlying shopping centers.*

The city's inflexible approach to parking minimums has led to growth that often sets aside far too much land for parking, with spaces often underutilized. The requirements for asphalt/cement paving can lead to further depletion of groundwater aquifers and contribute to the urban heat island effect<sup>5</sup>. The city responded by enacting variances that they hoped would reduce excessive or redundant parking. Wisely, they permitted the double counting of spaces used during different hours by different categories of properties. While this has certainly eased parking regulations for many new mixed-used developments in the city, there remains a glaring oversight by the city's planners: transit. Times have changed, and what was once a fledgling transit provider is now touted as one of the best in the nation. CATA currently boasts over thirty routes, a fleet of 122 buses, 2 trolleys, 52 small buses, and 55 low-floor vans, and a daily ridership of 46,500, which has grown 6.4% since the previous fiscal year. It runs fixed-schedule routes, paratransit services, a late-night service connecting entertainment districts, and serves a burgeoning student population with routes over a catchment area of 559 square miles. Furthermore, its routes converge on the two economic hubs of the region, the downtown business district and the Michigan State University, both of which have witnessed massive growth in the last few decades<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Diana E. Bowler et al., "Urban Greening to Cool Towns and Cities: A Systematic Review of the Empirical Evidence," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 97, no. 3 (2010): pp. 147-155, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2010.05.006>.

<sup>6</sup> "Home: Capital Area Transportation Authority," CATA, 2020, <https://www.cata.org/About>.





**CATA SYSTEM MAP**  
Greater Lansing Area Map With CATA Routes  
Effective: August 2020

QUESTIONS? Call our Customer Experience Center at  
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ROUTE INDEX	
1	Downtown Lansing – Meridian Mall
2	S. Washington – Pleasant Grove
3	Willow – Lansing Mall
4	South Cedar – Edgewood
5	Cedar – Jolly Connection
6	Aurelius – Miller
7	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
8	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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12	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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15	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
16	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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18	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
19	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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23	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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25	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
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31	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
32	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
33	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff
34	South Harrison – Jolly – Duncleff

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*CATA now boasts 34 routes, frequent, reliable and heavily used services*



*Despite fewer requirements thanks to new mixed-use variances, parking still constitutes far too much of properties that line transit routes.*

Thus, I propose a relaxation of parking minimums in areas within a quarter-mile radius of the city's transit stops, recommending that properties in that area merely provide half of the current requisition of spaces. The precedence certainly exists in cities across the nation, which have successfully scrapped their parking minimum rules entirely. These include both large cities, such as San Francisco, and mid-tier cities comparable to Lansing, such as Buffalo<sup>7</sup>. Reducing these minimums has been correlated with lower rates of car ownership and cheaper rents in cities such as Portland, Seattle and Minneapolis, where the percentage of households without cars are 5-10% higher than Lansing's rate of 12.6%<sup>8</sup>. Each parking space occupies anywhere from 288 to 396 square feet, space which could potentially be used more productively.

As Michigan's capital region continues to grow steadily (3.4% in the last decade), it must grapple with increasing transportation demand and changing commute patterns. The last half century of sprawl has destroyed large swathes of farmland and pushed housing up against numerous rivers and lakes. In an era where climate change is an ever-present threat, Lansing city planners ought to revisit their antiquated parking minimum regulations and acknowledge the need for transit-oriented development in their city.

#### **1284.06. - Variances.**

(c) If a property lies within a quarter mile of a transit stop, the scheduled off-street parking minimums as described in 1284.13 are halved in quantity.

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen, Michael, and Laura Feldman. "2018 Was the Year Parking Reform Went from Minor to Major League." Sightline Institute, January 28, 2019. <https://www.sightline.org/2018/12/10/parking-reform-minneapolis-san-francisco/>.

<sup>8</sup> Governing, "Vehicle Ownership in U.S. Cities Data and Map," Governing, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.governing.com/gov-data/car-ownership-numbers-of-vehicles-by-city-map.html>.