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Foreward

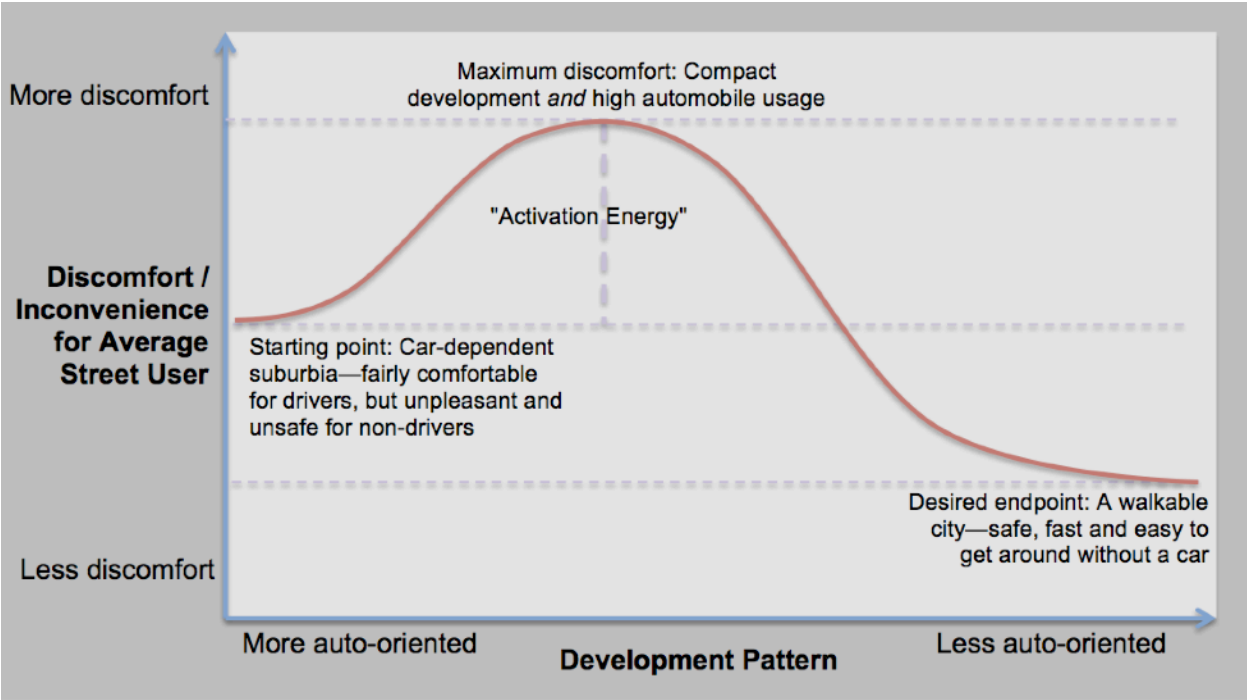
At Nashua Strong Towns, we are opposed to adding parking minimums to Nashua Downtown. At this point in time, we should be considering removing parking minimums from the rest of the city, not looking to increase the number of cars in our densest, most economically productive area of the city.

The city of Nashua has done great work over the course of the last decade or so, pushing for urban infill that provides good tax dollars to the city, while also creating a more pleasant and walkable experience for the city’s residents/patrons.

The city has shown its willingness to invest in downtown, the heartbeat of Nashua - with a number of major investments like the new Performing Arts Center and desire to get regional rail service to and from Massachusetts, while at the same time focusing on smaller bets like outdoor dining.

At Nashua Strong Towns, we believe adding parking minimums in downtown shows a *strategic disinvestment in downtown* - actively allocating additional space for vehicles at the expense of people. Nashua Downtown is the only area in the city that does not have parking minimums, and we need more areas like it, not to nix the only car-lite area in Nashua.

The broader Strong Towns org writes about the catch-22 of retrofitting the suburbs. In Nashua downtown, we are beginning to hit the point of “maximum discomfort” and we now have two options, we can move towards making the area more walkable, or revert back to becoming less walkable.



Given Nashua’s strategic push for a stronger downtown, we think this disinvestment in Nashua’s downtown does not fit with its previous strategy, effectively undoing years of hard work the city has successfully completed over the last decade or so.

That's not just Nashua Strong Towns saying this, Nashua currently has an ambitious 20 year plan called the Imagine Nashua Master plan. All in all it is an incredible plan that would push Nashua to become a more walkable, cyclable, and livable community, while at the same time ensure increased economic prosperity for the city.

The Imagine Nashua Master Plan discusses many things, but many near-term objectives come in direct contradiction with parking minimums.

In some areas, the master plan discusses the importance of reducing parking minimums.

Recommendation 4

Timeframe: Near-term

Consider parking alternatives

Recommendation 3

Timeframe: Near-term

Reduce minimum parking requirements and continue to encourage shared parking to minimize additional traffic generation and encourage the use of sustainable transportation modes

While specifically for Main Street and Nashua Downtown, the idea of parking minimums conflicts with the need to add protected cycle and accessibility lanes.

Recommendation 2

Timeframe: Near-term/ongoing

Evaluate opportunities for developing protected bicycle lanes on Main Street to increase safety and accessibility for all ages and abilities.

Page 71-77 provides recommendations that include everything from removing onstreet parking for wider sidewalks/bike lanes, looking for alternatives to parking, to encouraging urban infill. None of which are compatible with parking minimums **(next page)**.

Recommendation 1

Timeframe: Near-term/ongoing

Facilitate public realm expansion and improvement on Main Street to maintain downtown's commercial activity, particularly along sections with active retail and restaurant frontages to create ample space for seating areas and/or small plazas.

- This expansion can be accommodated by a combination of two strategies: expanding the sidewalk into areas where on-street parking currently happens, as well as shrinking and/or removing existing lanes on Main Street itself.
- Depending on the specific uses happening on different parts of the block, the balance of these two strategies changes. The included drawing suggest a first version of how the distinctions might be navigated.

Recommendation 5

Timeframe: Mid-term

Encourage quality infill development in vacant or prime redevelopment parcels that is consistent with the area and offers opportunities for increased amenities and economic development

Recommendation 2

Timeframe: Near-term

Encourage quality infill development that is consistent with the area and offers opportunities for increased amenities and economic development. It is likely that there are more redevelopment and infill opportunities on the southern section of Main St.

Driving is also a key driver of climate change, something that has been reported on by GISS since 2010. Nashua's "Livable Nashua" plan pushes for a green, sustainable future, but parking minimums come in direct conflict with this goal. With temperatures as high as 89°F in May, with a clear conscience, can we truly afford to add more parking?

It is time to consider alternatives.

No parking minimums

Not in downtown, and ideally not anywhere in Nashua. We want to make sure that the town has adequately considered alternatives to parking minimums.

At Nashua Strong Towns we are well aware of the city's looming "car conundrum" and know that the next steps we take are pivotal to ensuring the future of the town continues to move towards more walkable, pedestrian and cyclist friendly infrastructure. With cars being the primary means of transportation even in downtown, it is time to start making it more pleasant for folks who are walking.

We want to stress there are a lot of possible solutions for handling the town's car conundrum. Below is not every possible solution, but ones we have put our heads together to get for the town.

To make it physically easier to walk and cycle

Traffic calming

We follow a number of newsletters from aldermen, and talk with plenty of folks around the town. We have heard many times that folks speed through downtown (Main Street and other areas).

We believe the town has not done adequate work to calm traffic in town yet, ensuring the pedestrian experience is subpar. Let us be clear, changing the speed limit of a street does not fix this problem. We recommend reading about traffic calming if you have not heard of it before.

When folks think about traffic calming often times they will think of metal bollards, thick cement sidewalks, and very windy roads, all of which cost non-negligible amounts of money to retrofit onto existing roads, but it is important to remember we do not need to start like this.

In ward 9, a very suburban ward, one resident has taken it upon themselves to calm traffic without necessarily knowing what traffic calming is. Through a currently tight corner onto a road with a posted 25-30 mph speed limit, where nobody goes less than 45, a little plastic "slow down" child stands.



This \$30 piece of plastic has done an incredible job slowing down cars which would previously take tight turns here at high speeds, acting as a de-facto slip-lane despite the stop sign.



When asking why we have a car conundrum in the city we also have to ask - is the walking experience pleasant? Would you trust a 6 year old to walk around and not get hit by a speeding car?

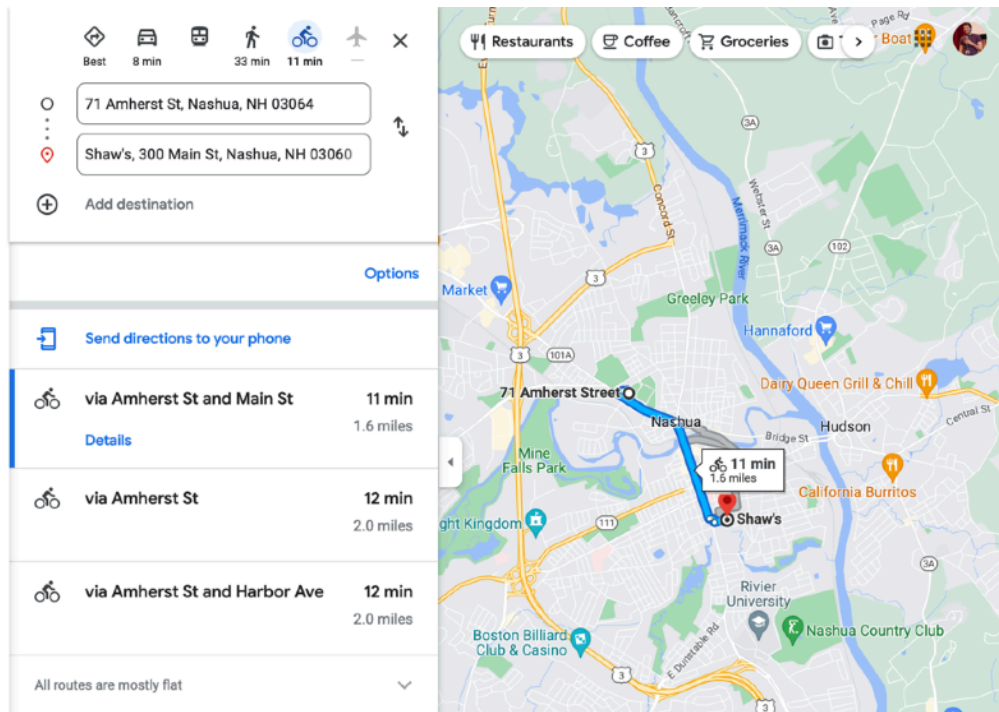
If the answer is no, then we have not done enough yet. It is understandable folks will continue to use cars as a primary means of transportation if they are fearful of losing their life to a speeding car.

Immediate action can be done for an extremely small amount of money. You can see another example of traffic calming at a busy intersection in Charlotte NC done exclusively with orange cones.

Dedicated cycle lanes

Downtown Nashua is not large, and yet it does have many of the amenities folks will need. Shaws on Main Street is not particularly far from downtown (less than 2 miles from Amherst Street, a key area of redevelopment in the master plan), which according to Google Maps should mean a 10 minute bike ride to and from the area to pick up groceries.

Given an e-cargo bike, picking up groceries should be easier than ever for a very large number of residents, young, and old. And yet unlike Cambridge MA, we have seen zero cargo-bikes in the area. Folks opt for bigger and more expensive vans, SUVs, and cars despite their increased space usage, and the difficulty of finding parking that the city has enumerated with the recent parking study.



Why is that? We do not provide adequate cycling infrastructure. Most folks in city would not feel safe cycling to and from destinations themselves, let alone letting their children cycle to and from a friend's house. It is unsafe.

When talking with politicians around the city, we find many would like to add cycle lanes, but believe there is a significant cost to adding them.

Similar to traffic calming though, adding cycling infrastructure can start with something as simple as orange cones, of which the city should already have many. When residents feel safe enough to get around city with a bike, they may opt to have only one car instead of multiple.

As we continue to build finances and solidify areas where folks want to cycle, we can add more permanent infrastructure, but make no mistake, there are inexpensive solutions we can make today to improve the situation in Nashua.

Even in Cambridge, a city which has done immense work to increase cycling - going so far as to update the paving code to ensure cycle lanes are included in most roads, many cycle lanes



still use plastic bollards cemented to the ground with some paint. Despite the lack of full cement grade separation, the number of cyclists between Nashua and Cambridge is drastic.

Bike parking

In the city immense work has been done to ensure that cars can park, of which there are a huge number of places where you can safely and effectively store your car.

To illustrate just how much parking there is in the “core” of Main Street, the PayByPhone app shows how much we have hollowed out downtown for parking in purple. This is a small subsection, but it highlights just how much of Nashua Downtown we have ceded to car parking.



So then what of bike parking? Do we have many places to park a bike? The answer to that is a resounding no. All it takes is a short walk around Main Street to see we have invested trivially low amounts of money and infrastructure to bicycle parking (**next page**).



Many of these photos were taken in cooler weather (40°F). There are even MORE bikes out and about now that the weather is better. It is no wonder we have a car parking conundrum, as even folks in the vicinity (a mile or less away) will likely try to drive to downtown.

Replacing even a single car parking spot with bike parking can increase bike parking capacity by up to 20 additional bicycles, comfortably fitting 10-12.

Upgraded transit - general

This is something we are well aware the town would like to improve. There has been much fanfare about how we need better bus service - both in frequency and location. This is extremely expensive and we are well aware of it, but it would be remiss not to include it.

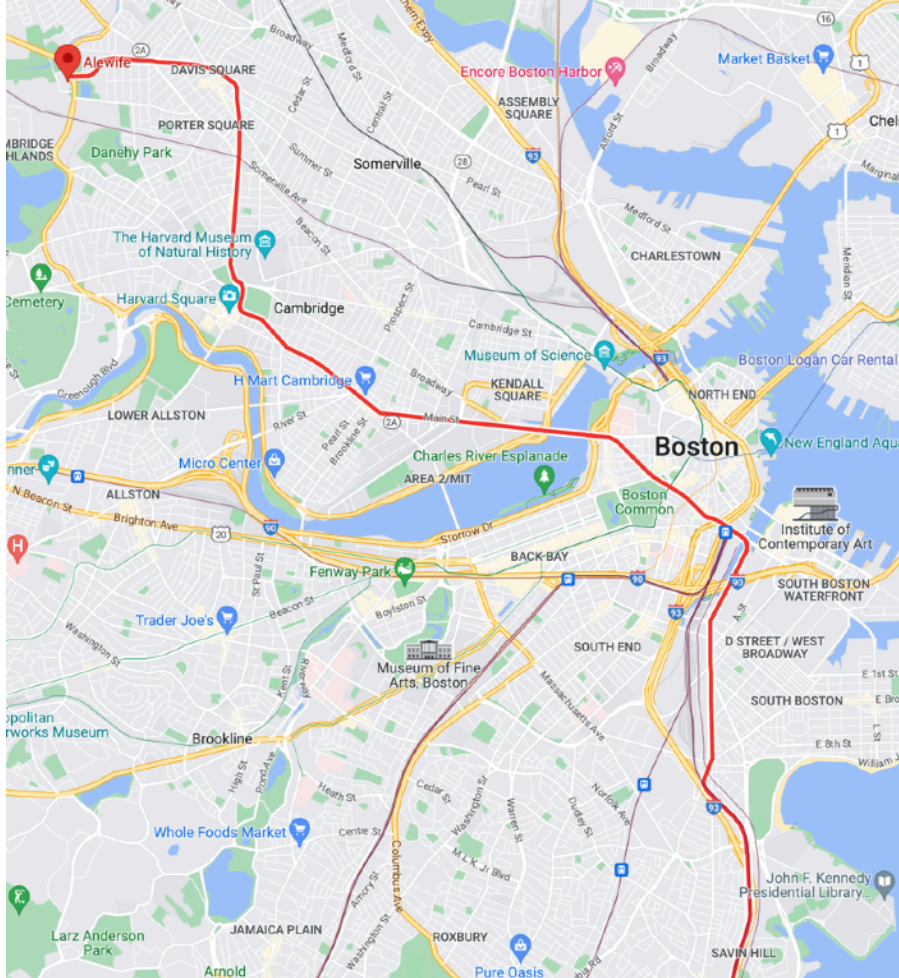
Transit out of the city must be improved as well. We are aware of the city's continued push for the commuter rail. This is a critical component of a more walkable future.

Upgraded transit - park and rides

With the Performing Arts Center, at Nashua Strong Towns we are well aware we are looking to pull in dollars from out of state and out of town to attend performances, not just in Nashua.

Boston and Cambridge are both in a similar boat here as well, looking to get out of state and out of city dollars. Commuter Rail is a way to do this, but for a more local, immediate, and cost effective solution, we could replicate what Alewife station does in a cost-effective way.

Alewife station uses the MBTA as rapid transit in and out of Cambridge to provide easy access to Cambridge and Boston **(next page)**.



Believe it or not, this service is much slower than it was before, with red line trains coming with a delay of up to 20 minutes. Yet it still works. While we would like to advocate for light rail, we are aware it is quite expensive. However we don't need rail to replicate this in Nashua yet.

Similar to when the city of Nashua had the Holiday Stroll, with what could probably be described as bus rapid transit to and from downtown, this could be replicated, immediately with parking lots outside of downtown.

If properly implemented - when folks buy a ticket to the Performing Arts Center, instructions could be included on how to access the rapid transit to and from town - drive to a parking lot and get picked up by a bus that comes every 15 minutes.

With the proper lot, food trucks could be provided in the area during big events to make the area more lively while folks wait for the bus during big events. This would not come at any cost and would be a strong public-private partnership helping to bolster small businesses in the area.

Overnight parking

If we really do need more car parking, and we cannot wait for anything else, allowing overnight parking will temporarily increase the parking supply of the city, giving the town more time to think of more creative solutions than parking minimums.

Barbershop, corner store, coffee shop upzoning

As it is - many of the areas outside of direct downtown have little or no retail in the area. Those specific areas are for just housing with a few exceptions (some mixed-use villages).

Upzoning areas to full mixed-use is quite an undertaking, and something we need to do. But if the town is looking for a way less divisive change to increase walkability in an area while at the same time helping bolster local businesses, upzoning all residential areas around downtown to permit small, non-intrusive businesses mixed with housing with zero additional parking requirements will help the cause.



By providing more amenities near residents, living car-lite or car-free in and around downtown becomes more viable. Two car households can become one car households as more general locations open up nearby.

Incentives for mixing retail and housing

Chatting with many politicians, Nashua Strong Towns is aware there is sometimes pushback to mixing retail and housing - as housing can be more lucrative, and is much easier to include. If proper mixed use is something the city wants, we need to incentivize it more.

For downtown - providing a tax-break for the bottom floor of new mixed-use condominiums/apartment complexes that provide X units of new housing may push certain developers that would not have included it, to include retail on the ground floor.

This could be flexible too if the city is interested in getting certain businesses or business types in downtown -



say grocery stores, child-care facilities, or the like, the incentives could be changed as need be, perhaps on a yearly basis until there is no more need for them.

For upzoned residential areas (as mentioned in the previous section) we lack many small businesses, and the small businesses that exist are rarely able to compete. Providing more comprehensive tax-breaks for small retail locations that include housing will ensure they can compete with big-box stores until there is critical mass to provide enough customers to them.

Grocery delivery

One sticking point we have heard a lot in Nashua Strong Towns is that for folks who live in and around downtown, it is difficult to do grocery shopping. Many still need to own a car to visit the closest grocery store, or opt to go a little further to D.W. highway to get less expensive groceries at Market Basket.

The town should consider spinning up a grocery-delivery program, perhaps as a public-private partnership to alleviate additional costs included with grocery delivery. If Shaw's, Market Basket, or other grocery stores could have their delivery costs covered or subsidized (with residents still paying for the groceries), how many fewer cars would residents need in and around downtown? Even a simple weekly credit for something like Instacart could help here.

If need be, restrictions could be placed around the program to ensure its cost effectiveness. Qualification may be based on if residents live in higher density housing (minimum density to take advantage). Partnerships could be formed with local supermarkets to decrease delivery costs by batch delivering groceries on a certain day (e.g. every Wednesday and Sunday).

Rideshare programs - e.g. Zipcar

All the bike lanes and the like aside, folks will still need to leave Nashua from time to time. In many colleges (UMass Lowell comes to mind as an immediate example), the bottom floor of parking garages do not allow folks to park their own cars, but are instead replaced with car-share cars.

For folks living car-lite or car-free, making it easy to get car-share cars ensures that the cars residents do need to get around and out of the city do not take up large amounts of space. Oftentimes these services are more cost effective than owning a car especially if most of the resident's day-to-day needs can be taken care of in-the city.



With a public-private partnership, we can again do this with little to no cost to the city, possibly even taking a percentage of the revenue to make up for “lost” parking revenue. The city of Boston did a pilot program in 2015 with Zipcar and Getaround, and it was so successful they expanded drastically afterwards.

If replicated like Boston - car-share cars provide the additional benefit of ensuring they always have parking, alleviating an additional stress that many residents have when going to and from downtown.

Car-free transit to and from Boston

One of the areas Nashua is sorely lacking in downtown and surrounding areas is easy access to and from Boston and the surrounding areas. As the town notes - we are looking to bring in out of state dollars to Nashua downtown and to the new Performing Arts Center.

There are plenty of folks who also commute to and from Boston (a number in our Nashua Strong Towns group as well), and even when taking public transit into the city, a car is still required.

We are aware the city is looking to add regional rail service a-la Commuter Rail which will alleviate the problem, but we need a solution in the meantime especially as the presence of young urban professionals begin to gravitate towards downtown and the surrounding area.

Ensuring there is easy access to and from Boston is key to reducing the number of cars that Nashua residents have, so it is important we are able to provide some level of service. This could be done in a few ways.

- Bus transit directly from Nashua downtown to Boston - competing or partnering with the Boston/Logan express
- Bus transit from downtown directly to the Tyngsboro park and ride which lines up with the bus schedule there.
- Bus transit from downtown directly to the Lowell commuter rail which lines up with the rail schedule there.

And of course as these stops are bidirectional, this would fill the gap the commuter rail is looking to fill in the meantime while we continue to push for train service.

If we really need parking minimums

Do we really need parking minimums? Is the city sure? We hope that the above possible alternatives is enough to sway the city, and push us to a more walkable future. But if not we have prepared a response for these as well.

Setting a expiration date on parking minimums

Before we get into the minutiae of what we would want to see out of parking minimums, it is critical for the city to define and end goal for when parking minimums are revoked. Listening to the PEDC meetings, the committee is well aware these are not supposed to be a permanent endeavor. However if we do not define up front what that is, when we implement them, they are likely to become sticky.

It is critical that if parking minimums are added, there is a built-in expiration.

What should that expiration look like?

Talking with a number of politicians around town, many are keen to say when Nashua gets access to the Commuter Rail, we will be in a good place to revoke parking minimums. At Nashua Strong Towns we do not believe this is a good end goal, both as the state DoT is trying its hardest to delay Commuter Rail access, but also as we would make the argument that intra-city (within Nashua) travel is more important to ensuring Nashua is less car-dependent.

At Nashua Strong Towns we would make a couple of recommendations here for how to implement this, but are open to suggestions:

Whatever comes first:

- A self-set expiration (X years in the future) where they will be automatically revoked
- Rapid transit within the city (BRT - bus rapid transit, or light rail)
- When the town hits a certain density requirement in the downtown area and it is unfeasible to continue to have them and/or for everyone to transport themselves by car.

It is critical this is done well, as otherwise policies like these tend to have a habit of sticking around for longer than they need to - having an inordinate effect on the city and its development.

Requirements within parking minimums

With the expiration out of the way - it is important that if downtown parking minimums are added, there are a number of stipulations. Some which have already been discussed in the PEDC meetings.

In lieu parking waiver

Allowing businesses to opt out of adding parking by paying a fee is a good way to ensure we have additional funds to implement either the additional parking required to support, say, bus rapid transit to a park and ride, or additional parking structures needed for car-share programs.

It is critical though that if the in lieu parking waiver is added, that the actual fee for not adding parking is less expensive than buying that same land downtown.

The goal of the parking waiver should be to reassure businesses that the town will handle the “parking problem” and incentivize them *not* to add more parking than downtown.

The town should also not be looking to use said funds to add additional parking in downtown, but in the surrounding areas. Downtown should be walkable and car-lite, and no additional parking structures should be added in direct downtown.

Inter/intra-facility shared lots

Parking is just that, parking. Bare asphalt with nothing on it. There is no reason parking structures cannot be shared amongst businesses that have folks coming and going at different times. For instance, in a residential area folks might commute out during the day to work, while an office will have folks parking at the same times.

Letting businesses share parking amongst themselves to hit parking requirements may fill the need the city is worried about, while not expanding the square footage of parking in downtown as much.

Allow waivers for including non-car parking

Why should parking requirements just be for cars? Given the Imagine Nashua master plan we should be incentivizing alternatives modes of transport. If a business adds, say 100 bike parking spots instead of 8 car parking spots, they should be exempt from adding car parking.

This is a win-win for the city as bike parking is sorely lacking in downtown and may be a factor that pushes more folks to use a bike or the like to get to downtown instead of a car.

Addendum

At Nashua Strong Towns, we'd like to thank the city for taking time to hear us out and at the very least to talk to us. We are aware parking is a touchy subject in the city, but at Nashua Strong Towns, we believe this is an important conversation to have.

*Nashua Strong Towns local conversation leader - Darrien Glasser
- And the rest of Nashua Strong Towns*