



September 13, 2023

**Re: Fairfax County's Parking Reimagined Draft Recommendations for Zoning Ordinance Article 6**

Good evening members of the Fairfax County Planning Commission and everyone joining tonight's meeting. My name is Kevin O'Brien and I am testifying today on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (otherwise known as WABA) and our nearly 6,000 members across Fairfax County, Northern Virginia, and the Washington metropolitan region. I offer comments on Fairfax County's draft recommendations for Zoning Ordinance Article 6, part of the County's Parking Reimagined project, and specifically on the provisions for bike parking.

For fifty years, WABA has worked to transform the capital region by improving the conditions for people who bike. Our work alongside local partners like the Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling to advocate for dedicated bike infrastructure, pass laws that promote safe roadway behavior, and provide education programming for all road-users has resulted in a drastically different cultural and political approach to biking for transportation. Biking can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our communities. Critical to that vision is a supply of safe, accessible, and free bicycle parking that accommodates both current and future needs. If there is no place to park a bicycle, people will not bike there.

With that in mind, WABA has greatly appreciated the work done to include bicycle parking requirements in the latest draft version of Section 6102 of the Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance. But while the proposed requirements are a good start, we are concerned that the minimum requirements for bike parking are insufficient and the guidelines incomplete.

Compared to neighboring and other similar jurisdictions, Fairfax County's proposed bicycle parking minimums are simply too low to meet both current and projected future needs. As an example, in a 36-unit condo development, 47 vehicle parking spaces would be required (1.3 x 36), but only 3 bicycle parking spaces (5% of 48). People in most households have at least one bicycle; my partner and I have 3 combined. Requiring only three spaces for this development is grossly inadequate. While the bike parking requirements are rightfully more extensive in Commercial Revitalization Districts (10%, 5 spaces in the example above) and in Transit Station Areas (15%, 8 spaces in the example), those numbers are still insufficient. If this condo development were in nearby Washington,

DC, a minimum of 12 bicycle parking spaces would be required (1 long-term space for every 3 units). If located in Portland, Oregon, 54 bike parking spaces would be required (1.5 bike parking spaces per unit).

In particular, we think additional and ample bicycle parking is needed at specific locations such as schools, recreation centers, libraries, and other critical community destinations if Fairfax County wants to encourage bicycling to these locations. Bicycle parking is a far more cost-effective use of space at these locations and an important means of incentivizing non-car trips. **In short, we urge the County to adopt higher bike parking minimums across the board, to at least the maximum in the ranges presented.**

We also question Fairfax County's insistence on basing bike parking minimums on vehicle parking minimums. Fairfax has stated goals of *reducing* personal vehicle usage and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and *increasing* bike usage per the Countywide Bicycle Master Plan. It would seem counterproductive to tie infrastructure supporting a travel mode you are trying to incentivize – more biking – to a metric you are overall trying to reduce – less driving. If Fairfax is successful in 'right sizing' car parking, one consequence could be fewer required bike parking spaces. The future viability of non-auto transportation should not be hampered by or coupled to needed reforms to car parking minimums; **therefore, we urge that bike parking minimums be independently calculated and set based on square footage (for commercial buildings) or number of units (for residential).**

Also missing from the County's proposal are specifications regarding the types or mix of bike parking spaces that must be provided. In short, all bike parking is not the same and can't be treated the same. Utilizing my previous example of a 36-unit condo development again, the developer could choose to meet the minimum bike parking requirement exclusively with outdoor, uncovered, unsecured staple-style bike racks. Such racks are perfectly acceptable for short-term storage on the sidewalk, outside a store or library, but they are wholly inadequate for long-term, overnight storage. Alternatively, the developer could meet the minimum exclusively via in-building, secure bike lockers but then include no publicly-accessible bike parking useful to visitors. Both scenarios fail to meet the needs of County residents. The growth of e-bikes exacerbates this issue; County residents will not want to store their thousand plus dollar e-bike outdoors exposed to the elements and the possibility of theft. **Therefore, we urge that the zoning ordinance and public facilities manual be updated, now or by a set date, with this nuance in mind and require a mix of both long-term and short-term bike parking based on land use.**

Lastly, we would call attention to the narrow set of triggering events wherein bike parking installation would be mandated: the construction of a new building or the expansion or change of use of an existing building. While there is no shortage of parking spaces throughout the County – hence this entire effort to 'right size' parking – there is a noted lack of bike parking. Unfortunately,

residents may very well have to wait years for redevelopment of existing buildings to see a spike in by-right bike parking under the proposed guidelines. We believe there are alternatives; nearby, the District of Columbia has implemented a system wherein residents can request a bike rack in the public space. Requests are vetted and not every one gets fulfilled but the District *has* installed 1,000 racks/year through this program. **Therefore, we urge the development of an organized method for requesting bike parking on County property by the end of 2024 as a stop-gap solution to address the acute bike parking shortage.**

To conclude, Parking Reimagined is an important opportunity to best position the County for the future of transportation. The current proposal is a good start but we hope the County will continue to iterate on the provisions related to bicycling. If we are to reach the County's goals regarding reduced carbon emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT), that future will have to include more bicycles and thus more bicycle parking. You don't have to look far for great examples of how to 'right size' both vehicle and bike parking so let's be sure we get it right.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share tonight, and look forward to continuing to work on this and other projects to make bicycling better in Fairfax County.

Respectfully,

Kevin O'Brien

Virginia Organizer | Washington Area Bicyclist Association