

PARKING LOTS

Treat parking strictly as an accessory use, with parking lots to the side and rear of buildings and featuring quality landscaping and architecture along the frontage, not views of asphalt.

Individually, cars are shiny and colorful, much admired for their streamlined shapes. So why are parking lots, full of sleek cars, so uniformly ugly? Lots of cars become masses of metal, clashing colors, crammed in rows like all the frustration of traffic congestion congealed. And how did the word “park” become linked with these asphalt lakes of encrusted oil? Asphalt lots are anti-earth, repelling greenery, summer sticky hot and winter icy slick. Whose fault is all this asphalt, and why are we herding all our cherished cars into these ever-expanding tar pits surrounding every building?

Put the Park in Parking

Parking can complement the building and street if it does not visually dominate the site. People often meet where they park their cars, so include places to casually talk out of the flow of traffic. Well designed and landscaped sites will yield more long-term value than the original investment, increasing financial returns for developers 5 - 15% according to a 1994 Urban Land Institute study.

- **Instead of empty lots, build parking groves and parking courts**, with a significant number of shade trees and surrounded by low hedges, stone walls or attractive fencing.
- **Divide the rows with planting strips and tree islands**, averaging a tree every 6 to 10 spaces.
- **Set landscaping guidelines for the interior of lots**; the zoning for Pawling and Hyde Park, for example, requires at least 15% of the inside area for larger lots be landscaped with trees and other plants.
- **Insist on a continuous landscaping treatment along any frontage** with street trees and low plantings and denser evergreens or fencing along residential neighbors.
- **Break up the blacktop and reduce water runoff** by using bricks, pavers, or textured surfaces for crosswalks and stalls, with grass block overflow areas.



Dia Center for the Arts in Beacon has proposed a distinctively landscaped parking grove with three types of flowering trees that promise abundant shade and an enticing entrance area.

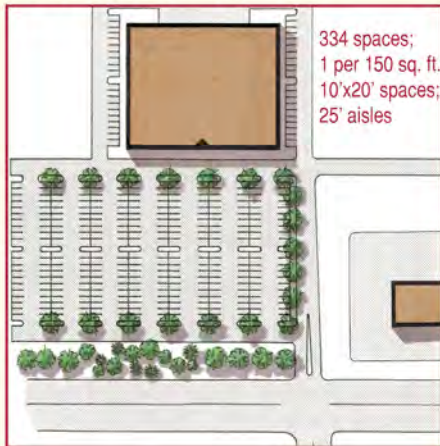
Artist: Robert Irwin, Computer Image: John Bacz



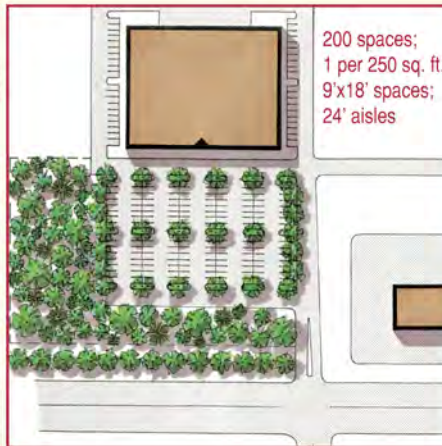
Diamond-shaped tree islands 6 feet wide provide a shade tree every 4 to 6 stalls, without losing a single parking space. Planting islands with gaps in the curbs can allow natural drainage of stormwater.

Less Wasted Spaces

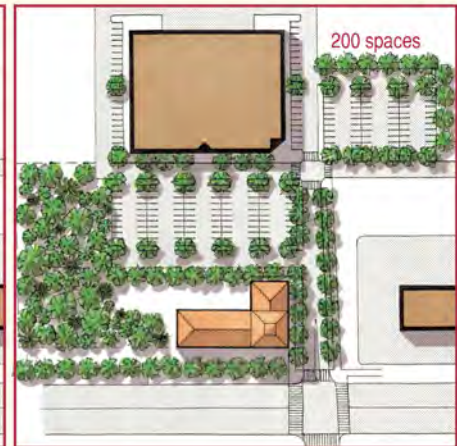
A Case Study



This proposal for a 50,000 sq. ft. store would have required 334 spaces based on outdated, overscaled parking standards.



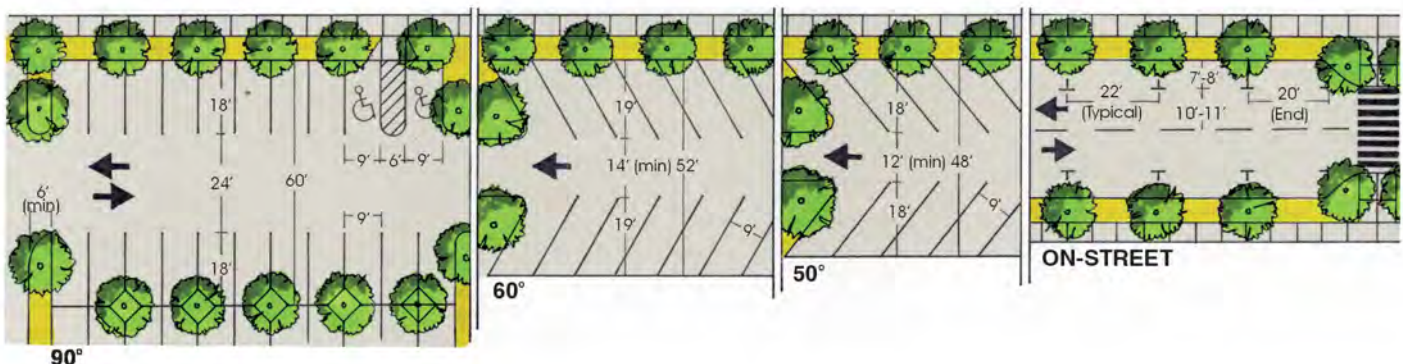
The asphalt can be cut in half by simply using current standards from sources such as the National Parking Association and Urban Land Institute.



Breaking up the parking into two areas further lot sizes and also allows room for smaller stores along the frontage to screen the parking lots.

Surface parking covers 60% of most suburban shopping centers and office sites. Outdated zoning laws often require parking lots with twice as much parking area as needed on a typical day, thus reducing building and landscaping potential on a parcel. Smaller, more flexible parking standards can emphasize architecture over asphalt and increase tax revenues from new infill businesses, as well as reduce stormwater pollution and help heal ugly gaps between buildings. And remember, there is no such thing as free parking. Each surface space costs \$50 per month on average to build and maintain, so smaller lots mean more available money for higher quality landscaping and site improvements.

- **Keep car places small**, breaking up large lots and encouraging shared parking between adjacent uses.
- **Put parking lots behind the building lines**, featuring instead fine architecture and front yard landscaping.
- **Add convenient on-street parking**, when possible, to count toward parking requirements and reduce lot sizes.
- **Encourage flexibility**; several localities, including the Town of Clinton and the Village of Fishkill, allow boards to waive up to half the required spaces for a trial period, rather than build more spaces than needed.
- **Use updated parking requirements** with efficient stalls and aisle sizes (see below) and current use standards.



Sources:

Mark Childs, Parking Spaces, 1999

Anton Nelessen, Visions for the New American Dream, 1993

Richard W. Willson, Suburban Parking Requirements, Journal of the American Planning Assoc., Winter 1995

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