

Creative design minimizes traffic impact

How to meet the transportation needs of a project's residents, tenants and customers can be key to the structure of an urban infill project. As our community looks to urban infill projects as a method for containing sprawl, the answer to this question becomes more critical, particularly with regards to parking.

For projects built beyond the core downtown area, the cost of building parking has historically been a minor factor in a development's design and financial structure due to the abundance of land available for surface stalls.

The need to build higher-density urban projects in order to maintain our rural spaces and quality of life has now led to an increasing use of structured parking facilities in neighborhoods where people are used to free or very inexpensive parking.

This presents a unique financial challenge: how to offset the high cost of building such parking (at \$55 to \$60 a square foot) when the revenue generated from it is limited, and without raising rents throughout the given project beyond what the market can sustain?

There are three possible solutions to this dilemma:

- Reduce the parking required to be built for urban locations where alternative methods of transit are readily available.
- Look for opportunities to combine uses in a single location, such as multifamily housing in conjunction with retail, office or even with neighboring schools.
- Obtain subsidies in order to offset the costs involved.

Several recent projects in this region show a trend for less demand for parking

TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS



Bruce Lorig



accommodate both residents and commuters, with some overlapping usage of space.

Now that the project has been completed and the apartments are leasing up quickly, the actual demand for parking has been substantially less than expected, with only 0.6 stalls per apartment actually being used by residents. That equals only 185 spaces as opposed to the 308 spaces that were required by code.

This suggests that even in an Eastside location such as Overlake, the current standard for parking may need to be revised for new developments when there is easy access to public transportation.

The Village at Overlake will provide important information for future transit-oriented developments. Many municipalities and transit authorities such as Metro and Sound Transit have targeted this concept as an effective way of using property.

The planning process, however, needs to incorporate new assumptions about

when other transportation options are available.

• The recently completed Village at Overlake Station transformed a Metro Park-and-Ride lot into a transit-oriented community with 308 apartments plus a day care, above a 500-stall parking garage and bus center. The project was designed to be large enough to ac-

commodate both residents and commuters, with some overlapping usage of space.

• Uwajimaya Village in Seattle's International District is one of several recent developments that combine housing with a grocery store and other related retail business built over underground parking.

During design, both the housing code and the needs of the retail component determined the parking requirements. By sharing parking spaces between residents and grocery store customers, the parking needed for the housing was reduced to one stall per apartment.

Now that the apartments are fully leased, the demand for parking is even less than expected, at only 0.9 stalls per apartment. This surprising result is because of the excellent public transportation options available nearby.

These projects are also excellent examples of how parking stalls can be shared by multiple users in one project. The traffic patterns of residential users are often countercyclical to those of grocery shoppers or office workers, therefore enabling parking stalls to be used more frequently during the course of a 24-hour period.

This solution is gaining in popularity, and when it is combined with public transportation access, it can result in a significant reduction in the amount and cost of parking built.

The third solution to this dilemma is to obtain financial subsidies such as tax exemptions, economic development loans, or discounts on land-sale prices. A current example of this type of financial structure is the Welch Apartments development pro-

ject, which is slated to start construction this fall.

Located at the corner of 23rd Avenue and South Jackson Street, this site has long been viewed as a primary development location for the ongoing revitalization of the Central Area neighborhood. The site's zoning permits the development of five and six-story buildings; however, the in-city location dictates that the associated parking be built underground.

Approximately 200 stalls will fit in a two-level underground parking garage, which would be sufficient to support 162 apartments and 18,000 square feet of commercial space.

The city of Seattle has acknowledged the importance of this project to the economic development of the area by providing financial support in exchange for affordable housing. The combination of these financial incentives will enable this urban infill project to be built, without driving rental rates beyond current market levels.

While parking will continue to be a primary factor behind many design and financial development decisions, our recent experience shows that perhaps our old assumptions regarding demand need to be re-evaluated and codes updated to match those realities.

Our community's transportation needs will continue to evolve, and how we choose to accommodate them will ultimately shape the places in which we live and work, for years to come.

BRUCE LORIG is the founding partner of Lorig Associates LLC of Seattle.