

Crafting Powerful Parking Reform Messages



Parking Reform Network, Sightline Institute, and Welcoming Neighbors Network combined messaging research and lessons from successful campaigns—in states from Montana to Washington, and cities as different as Denver, Hartford, Austin, and Gainesville—to develop a framework to help lawmakers and advocates build support for parking flexibility across race, class, and party affiliation.

The Parking Flexibility Framework

Focusing on flexibility works because it acknowledges that communities do need parking, but that wasteful mandates for excessive parking come at the cost of other things people value.

1. Define the PROBLEM: Waste and costs	2. Illustrate the SOLUTION: People and places	3. Offer clear ACTION: Parking flexibility
Excess parking is much more expensive than people realize, both in dollars and in opportunities lost. Explain specific harms of mandates: higher monthly rents, cancelled local businesses, and fewer homes we can afford.	When people are asked to prioritize between parking and other community benefits, they prefer the other benefits. Highlight solutions that move the conversation from a zero-sum argument to a productive conversation about what we want to provide for people in our community: more home choices, thriving Main Streets, and tree-lined streets.	When we define parking mandates as wasteful and costly, flexibility is a commonsense solution. It's unproductive to debate what amount of parking is right. Instead, emphasize that it's wasteful to mandate excess parking, and that parking needs vary widely depending on the specific location or the type of housing or business.



TIPS

- Focus on **CONVENIENCE** and **CONNECTION**, not “car dependence.” Switch the frame from “Where will I park?” to “What’s it like to live here?”
- Focus on real harms that impact people **RIGHT NOW**. Redirect “what if...” conversations to current impacts.
- Connect parking mandates to **AFFORDABILITY**. People don’t realize how expensive excess parking is. Explain that more affordable homes are possible with parking reform.
- Use **VISUALS** to contrast empty parking lots to vibrant neighborhoods.
- Emphasize how people **SEE** and **FEEL** the environment. Messages about trees being cut down, stormwater and air pollution, and sprawling development are more persuasive than abstract appeals about climate change.
- Position local homebuilders, business people, and property owners as the **TRUSTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS** who know the **SITE-SPECIFIC** needs for their project.

DOs and DON'Ts: Framing

<u>DO</u> : Focus on flexibility and safe, connected neighborhoods.	<u>DON'T</u> : Use jargon or keep the conversation on cars
Allow parking flexibility	Eliminate parking mandates
Wasteful parking mandates	Parking minimums; parking requirements
Wasted space, empty parking lots, acres of asphalt; prioritize home choices over waste and pavement	Car storage; homes for people, not cars
Local homebuilders, property owners, business owners; more home choices, local business investment	Developers; development
Neighborhoods where you can live near jobs and shopping, classic Main Street neighborhoods	Density; walkability; walkable

Example: Problem → Solution → Action Messaging

When we force locally-owned mom-n-pop shops, restaurants, and services to build big, expensive parking lots—especially in older storefronts and on smaller lots—they get blocked from opening or expanding or take their business further out of central, convenient locations in town. These small, local businesses are the heart of our communities, bringing people together and creating vibrant, inviting neighborhoods. We all benefit by dropping wasteful parking mandates and instead allowing more flexibility for homebuilders, businesses, and property owners to determine how much parking is needed for a specific site, location, and use. Parking flexibility means more local businesses can open and succeed.

Examples of Top-Performing Language

Wasteful and Outdated Mandates	Most parking mandates are based on 1960s-era guesses about future needs. They don't reflect what communities or businesses really need today—and the result is overbuilt parking that wastes space and adds costs. We need the flexibility to update our rules to address today's costs, lifestyles, and community needs.
Home Prices and Rent	Today's rules that force overbuilt parking add costs to housing and take up space that could go to the homes local workers in our community need. When there are not enough homes to rent or buy, we get cutthroat competition and higher prices. More parking flexibility makes more housing possible and helps control local housing costs.

