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Public Review Begins for Improvements to Manhattan Core Off-Street Parking Regulations

November 5, 2012 – City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden officially began the public review for the Department of City Planning (DCP)'s proposal to [update zoning regulations governing off-street parking in the Manhattan Core](#), comprised of Manhattan Community Districts 1-8 which is below 96th Street on the East Side and below 110th Street on the West Side. The Manhattan Core, which includes some of the most transit-rich areas of the city, already has no minimum parking requirements and limits on the amount of allowed parking. DCP is now proposing targeted improvements to these existing off-street parking regulations. The improved regulations would require that special permit requests for parking above the maximum as-of-right limits meet specific criteria demonstrating need. The proposal would also promote pedestrian safety, establish regulations for automated parking garages and, to reflect how parking is being used in the Core today, parking in new accessory facilities would be made available to the public. Additionally, outdated regulations affecting rental car establishments, loading facilities and the use of public parking facilities by small commercial vehicles would be updated. The new regulations would ensure that the amount of parking provided in the Manhattan Core meets parking needs while addressing the city's sustainability objectives of encouraging public transit and reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

Commissioner Burden said, "The Manhattan Core already has the most progressive parking regulations in the country and one of the lowest car ownership rates in the City, but we know that the regulations can be improved. This proposal will ensure the right amount of parking in the Manhattan Core is provided while promoting pedestrian safety and alternatives to owning a car. The proposal also supports an emerging technology, the automated garage. These regulations would further our sustainability goals by ensuring that developments that seek more parking than is allowed as-of-right justify that need by meeting specific criteria."

In December 2011, DCP released the Manhattan Core parking study which found that since the enactment of special parking regulations in 1982, the Manhattan Core has added population and jobs and the central business district has strengthened its position as the vital heart of a world city. At the same time, commuting into the central business district has shifted toward transit and away from private vehicles.

Regarding residential parking, while the percentage of car-owning households hasn't changed, the actual number of households in the Manhattan Core has increased, resulting in a greater number of residents' vehicles in the Core. In addition, Manhattan Core residents are increasingly using public parking facilities for monthly parking. These facilities, which 30 years ago mainly served commuters, are therefore now filling neighborhood needs for residential parking. Based on these findings, City Planning is proposing changes to the existing regulations:

Establish New Findings for Special Permits

Under existing regulations, accessory parking is allowed (but not required) in new developments up to a maximum amount. When an applicant is seeking to build a public garage, or accessory parking in excess of what is allowed as-of-right, the City Planning Commission must evaluate whether the proposed facility meets certain findings for a special permit. Currently, the findings are limited to ensuring that new facilities do not cause traffic congestion or overwhelm the local street network. This proposal would add to these findings by requiring that special permit requests demonstrate a specific need for additional parking spaces and, for parking facilities that are serving primarily commuters and visitors, demonstrating that measures have been considered to manage parking demand in lieu of additional parking spaces.

DCP's Manhattan Core study found that limited amounts of new parking are still needed to support parking needs generated by economic activity and residents. These new criteria would strengthen the special permit process, allowing communities, the City Planning Commission and City Council to consider the full range of relevant issues in determining whether additional parking is warranted, while providing additional guidance and clarity for applicants.

Create Flexibility for Public Parking

To meet the needs of both neighborhood residents and visitors, parking in new accessory facilities may be made available to the public as may existing accessory parking facilities currently operating with a Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) license. This reflects how parking is actually being used in the Core today. All facilities would retain the right to make spaces available only to specific users, such as residents of the building.

Establish New Layout and Design Requirements for New Parking Facilities

All new parking facilities, including accessory parking, would have layout and design requirements. The new requirements will promote pedestrian safety with signs, speed bumps and designated walking areas.

Create Standards for Automated Parking Facilities

Automated parking, in which a computer-controlled system moves vehicles into vertically stacked slots, has been widely used in Japan and Europe, and two facilities are currently in operation in the Manhattan Core with others planned. Automated garages take up less space than traditional garages and there are no emissions because car engines are not running. This proposal will accommodate this emerging technology. The proposal would give the Department of Buildings the flexibility to determine capacity of the garages consistent with current limitations, reduce reservoir space as needed, and permit increased height up to 40 feet to be exempted from floor area with a City Planning Commission Chair certification.

Allow Greater Flexibility for Rental Vehicles

Car ownership among Manhattan Core residents is relatively low -- 23% of households own a car compared to 46% citywide, and only a small share of Manhattan Core households commute to work by car. The Manhattan Core is a prime location for car rental and car share vehicles, which contribute to the low car ownership rate, encourage transit use and reduce the need for off-street parking. City Planning's 2010 car share text amendment allows car share vehicles to locate in public parking garages up to a maximum amount of 40% of spaces, but rental cars are more restricted. This proposal would increase the permitted size of rental car establishments and allow rental vehicles to park in public garages up to a maximum of 40% of spaces.

Create Flexibility for Small Commercial Vehicles

Within higher-density commercial and manufacturing zoning districts, small commercial vehicles would be allowed to occupy up to 50% of spaces in public parking lots and garages. Due to restrictions on commercial vehicle parking, many small commercial vehicles (such as vans) leave the Manhattan Core to park overnight even though spaces are typically available during these off-peak hours. Allowing more small commercial vehicles to park overnight in public parking facilities would eliminate the necessity to travel outside of the Manhattan Core, reducing congestion and emissions.

Increase the Depth of Loading Docks

The proposal would increase the required depth of loading docks from 33 feet to 37 feet so that trucks will have more room to unload and load without blocking sidewalks and pedestrians. Loading docks are already exempt from allowed floor area calculation, and this proposal would allow additional floor space caused by the deeper loading docks to be exempted from the floor area allowed. We are also proposing to exempt space for trash or recycling dumpsters up to 12' x 25' (300 square feet) for buildings over 100,000 square feet to encourage keeping loading areas clear.

Allow Older Developments to Reduce or Remove Parking

While parking is not required in new developments today, parking was required prior to the 1982 parking regulations and currently cannot be removed. This proposal would allow for reductions or removal of this once-required parking by a City Planning Commission authorization.

[The proposed zoning text amendment](#) will be referred to Manhattan Community Boards 1-8 and the Manhattan Borough President's office for a 60-day review period, followed by a City Planning Commission and City Council review.

Department of City Planning

The Department of City Planning (DCP) promotes strategic growth, transit-oriented development, and sustainable communities in the City, in part by initiating comprehensive, consensus-based planning and zoning changes for individual neighborhoods and business districts, as well as establishing policies and zoning regulations applicable citywide. It supports the City Planning Commission and each year reviews more than 500 land use applications for actions such as zoning changes and disposition of City property. The Department assists both government agencies and the public by providing policy analysis and technical assistance relating to housing, transportation, community facilities, demography, waterfront and public space.