

# MANHATTAN CORE PUBLIC PARKING STUDY

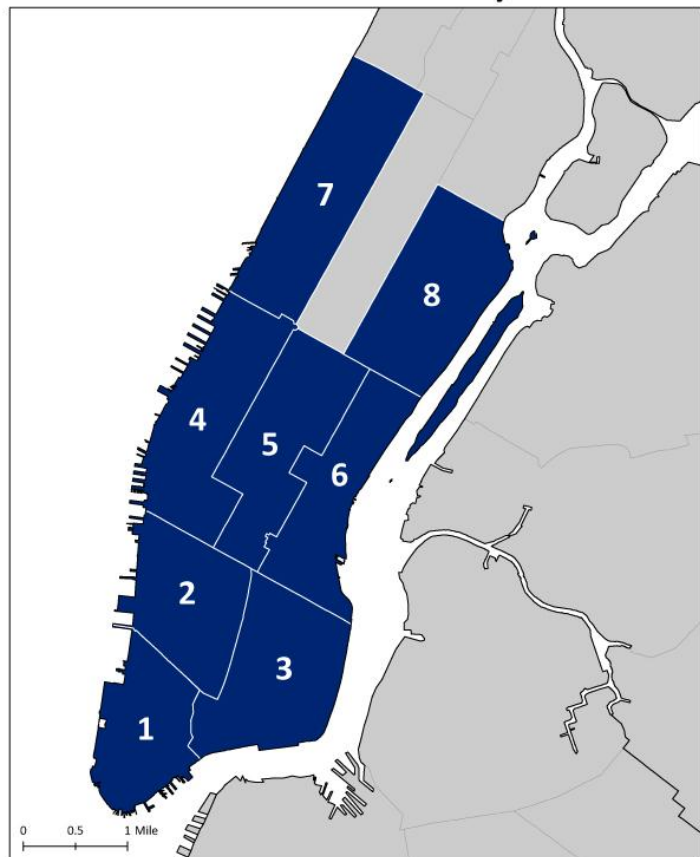
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1982, in the context of the Clean Air Act and national and local concerns about deteriorating air quality, the City of New York adopted pioneering rules to manage the supply of off-street parking in Manhattan’s Central Business District. The 1982 Manhattan Core parking zoning amendments sought, in the words of the City Planning Commission’s report, “to institute land use controls over off-street parking which are consistent with environmental policies and sensitive to the concerns of business and development interests in the City.” While the 1982 amendments recognized the continuing need for limited amounts of parking for vehicles associated with services, business, culture, and entertainment as well as residents, the strictest limits were reserved for public parking. It was anticipated that these limits, together with the redevelopment of sites with parking lots and garages, would, over time, reduce the overall number of public parking spaces and that with fewer parking spaces available, fewer motor vehicles would enter Manhattan’s most traffic-congested areas. These regulations continue to be in effect today in Community

Districts 1 through 8, comprising Manhattan below 96<sup>th</sup> Street on the East Side and 110<sup>th</sup> Street on the West Side. This area is referred to as the “Manhattan Core” in the New York City Zoning Resolution and includes some of the City’s most populous neighborhoods, major institutions, parks and transit hubs, and the City’s primary Central Business District (CBD), defined as Manhattan below 60<sup>th</sup> Street.

The most significant change in the 1982 parking regulations was a shift from minimum parking *requirements* for new residential development to maximum parking *allowances* for parking spaces that are limited to residents of the development, known as *accessory* spaces. Before 1982, off-

**Manhattan Core Community Districts**



street parking was mandatory in residential development in the Manhattan Core; since 1982, accessory parking is optional and subject to strict limits on the amount of parking that can be provided – no more than 20 percent of the number of residential units in Community Districts 1 through 6 and no more than 35 percent of units in Community Districts 7 and 8. Accessory parking for other uses is also subject to maximums, and the total number of spaces provided in a development is capped at no more than 225 spaces for any mix of uses. Under the 1982 regulations, only new developments and enlargements may incorporate parking, whereas prior to 1982 the creation of new parking in existing buildings was allowed. In addition, the 1982 regulations require special permits for accessory parking exceeding the maximums as well as for new parking in existing buildings and for all *public* parking facilities. New surface public parking lots are prohibited in prime commuter areas such as Lower Manhattan and Midtown except by special permit.

Looking back after almost 30 years, these regulations have proven to be compatible with a growing, successful Manhattan Core. The regulations allow limited amounts off-street parking to be provided with new development and allow some developments to provide additional parking by special permit. In doing so, the 1982 regulations strike a balance between discouraging auto commuting in a highly traffic-congested part of the city where transit access and walkability are excellent while recognizing that the need for off-street parking remains even when auto commuting is restrained.

Since 1982, physical and demographic changes in the Manhattan Core and trends in CBD-bound travel have altered the overall supply off-street parking and its utilization. While parking facilities have been built as part of new developments since 1982, more spaces have been eliminated – typically as public parking lots and garages have been redeveloped for other uses. The total off-street parking supply in the Manhattan CBD has decreased from approximately 127,000 public parking spaces in 1978 to 102,000 spaces in 2010. At the same time, formerly peripheral neighborhoods such as Tribeca and the Far West Side have seen the rise of a significant amount of residential redevelopment occupied by higher-income residents and families with children, characteristics highly correlated with car ownership. As a result, public parking facilities in the Manhattan Core are increasingly used by residents rather than Manhattan-bound commuters and other visitors, who are now choosing public transit over cars more than in 1982. The Manhattan Core has thrived during this time, and its distinction as the commercial, cultural, and residential center of the region is even stronger than it was.

It is on the basis of these changes that the Department of City Planning decided to investigate how off-street parking in the Manhattan Core is currently used and to employ that information, along with three decades of experience, to reexamine and update the Manhattan Core parking regulations while retaining their basic framework.

## Manhattan Core Parking Study

Certain deficiencies in the existing regulations have become apparent over the years since 1982, as has the need for additional data to better understand how off-street parking is utilized within the Manhattan Core. In 2008, with the assistance of a Federal grant, the Department launched a study to collect data about off-street parking in the Manhattan Core through a survey of current users, to analyze that data to better understand user characteristics, and to use that information to help in assessing the zoning regulations governing parking in the Core. Much of this research was conducted through the Manhattan Core Public Parking Survey.

The Manhattan Core Public Parking Survey was conducted between March and May 2009. Department staff collected almost 2,900 intercept surveys from 110 public parking facilities spread throughout the Manhattan Core. The number of parking spaces in the surveyed facilities represented approximately 15 percent of the 146,000 public parking spaces in the Manhattan Core licensed by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA). Respondents included commuters, people conducting business, Manhattan residents, medical patients, and those visiting for leisure. The survey included questions about trip purpose, home ZIP code, reasons for not taking mass transit, frequency of respondents' auto trips to Manhattan, and respondents' occupation. In addition to the survey of public parking users, the Department also collected operator-provided data about the parking facilities, including the percentage of spaces occupied by residential monthly parkers.

The Study also included analysis of Census and other data to furnish insight into how demographic trends and changes in car ownership patterns relate to utilization of off-street parking. Transportation data, including the annual reports on Hub (CBD)-bound travel issued by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC), were analyzed in order to ascertain how travel into the Manhattan Core has changed since 1982. In addition to data analysis, Department staff have closely reviewed the Manhattan Core regulations and the City Planning Commission's experience in recent years with review of parking special permit applications, with a view toward identifying areas where the regulations may be obsolete, inconsistent with current policies, or insufficient for a well-functioning special permit process. Staff have also interviewed practitioners with experience in parking facility design. More recently, the Department has conducted an ongoing survey of residential buildings constructed since 2000 in the Manhattan Core to determine, among other information, whether these buildings provided parking and whether the parking is public. Public parking facilities in New York City, except for municipal facilities operated by the City, are licensed by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA).

## Findings

The Manhattan Core study has yielded a number of key findings:

- **The Manhattan Core parking regulations have proved to be compatible with population and job growth and a thriving Central Business District.** In almost three decades since the Manhattan Core regulations were enacted, the Manhattan Core has added population and jobs and has strengthened its position as the vital heart of a world city. Travel into the CBD has shifted toward transit and away from private vehicles. While off-street parking is less critical than it was in this respect, it still plays an important role in supporting economic activity and provides a necessary amenity for residential neighborhoods in the Core.
- **The supply of off-street parking in the Manhattan CBD has declined** by about one-fifth since the Manhattan Core parking regulations were enacted. With the redevelopment of surface lots and garages, as well as the effects of the regulations in limiting the provision of parking, the number of off-street public (DCA-licensed) parking spaces below 60<sup>th</sup> Street has decreased from around 127,000 in 1978 to approximately 102,000 in 2010.
- **Levels of car ownership and auto commuting in the Manhattan Core are relatively low.** Approximately 23 percent of Manhattan Core households own a car (compared with 46 percent Citywide), and only about one-fifth of those households commute to work by car. However, since 1982, car ownership has increased at a faster rate in the Manhattan Core than in Manhattan outside the Core.
- **Public parking facilities serve a large number of Manhattan residents and fill neighborhood needs for residential parking.** In contrast with 1982, when most public parking was utilized by commuters and other business parkers, a large portion of spaces in public parking facilities were found to be utilized by Manhattan residents on a monthly basis. In public parking facilities located in residential and mixed-use buildings, approximately 60 percent of spaces were occupied by residential monthly parkers, most of whom do not live in the building but come from the surrounding neighborhood. In more residential neighborhoods such as the Upper East Side, over 70 percent of spaces in public parking facilities in residential and mixed-use buildings were used by neighborhood residents. To a much greater extent than in 1982, the supply of public parking is serving neighborhood needs for long-term residential parking.
- **Most new parking facilities in the Manhattan Core operate as public facilities,** despite zoning regulations that require permitted parking to be reserved for accessory use only. In part, this is a result of the complexity of the zoning regulations, which require certain spaces to be reserved for certain users (e.g., residents of the building, customers of the retail

stores in the building), some of whom are transient while others are not. These regulations have proven cumbersome and difficult to enforce. The widespread practice of operating new parking facilities, treated as accessory in zoning, as public facilities has resulted in a straightforward and successful system of multiuse parking that expands options for parkers, including residents seeking parking in their neighborhood. While the 1982 regulations assumed that distinguishing between accessory and public parking is necessary to ensure that there is parking sufficient to meet residential demand, today residents are able to secure parking through the market for public parking.

- **Limited amounts of new parking are still needed.** Many travelers into the Manhattan Core who park in public parking facilities make all or most of their trips into the Core by car. New investments in transit infrastructure and land use policies that encourage transit-oriented development are expected to further the positive trend of the last 30 years, where people traveling into the Manhattan CBD have come by transit in ever greater numbers. For the foreseeable future, however, parking will still be needed to accommodate some share of trips into the Manhattan Core, even if that share continues to fall. As the survey results showed, people choose to drive for a variety of reasons ranging from the needs of their job, because they are transporting goods or other people, or the inadequacy of transit where they live. A population of car-owning households in the Manhattan Core will remain, in part because residents of new housing in the Core tend to own cars at higher rates than the residents of existing housing. Some new parking will be necessary to support economic activity and accommodate residential demand.

On the whole, the Department concludes that the 1982 Manhattan Core parking regulations have been successful and do not require fundamental changes. However, targeted modifications could update the regulations to reflect contemporary conditions, improve their functioning, and provide more clarity and predictability. Some possible modifications along these lines are discussed in the concluding section, “Study Findings and Parking Policy Goals.” In brief, the suggestions include:

- Formalizing the current system of public parking;
- Improving parking special permits for fuller consideration of the appropriateness of proposed facilities;
- Developing specific criteria for special generators and large sites;
- Removing obsolete regulations that could hinder the provision of affordable housing;
- Revising regulations to promote pedestrian-friendly streetscapes;
- Establishing layout standards for new parking facilities that promote pedestrian safety and well-functioning streets; and

- Providing for automated parking facilities.

This report consists of the following sections:

- Policy Background
- Manhattan Core Demographic Trends Since 1980
- Manhattan Core Public Parking Survey Findings
- Study Findings and Parking Policy Goals