

# Bike-friendly Portland has parking issues

Ore. city wants to keep growing but stay green

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Though Portlanders are remarkably united when it comes to protecting the environment — curbside composting is the norm and terms such as locavore are ubiquitous — a property on aptly named Southeast Division Street has provoked an unexpected backlash against the city's progressive approach to housing its burgeoning population.

The general reason for the controversy — insufficient parking — is typically American. But how this got to be a problem on Division Street typifies Portland, a place proud of its plastic shopping bag ban and global warming "action plan" but still struggling with how to grow while staying green.

A developer, Dennis Sackhoff, last year demolished what had been the city's landmark lesbian bar and started construction on a four-story, 81-unit apartment building that will include scores of bicycle racks — but not one parking space for automobiles.

It's one of about 30 parking-free apartment buildings that have been recently completed or are in some stage of development in the city, mostly in the cozy neighborhoods on the east side.

Developers such as Sackhoff are capitalizing on one of the nation's tightest rental markets while following Portland zoning rules that require them to provide parking for bicycles but not cars.

The people who already live in these neighborhoods worry about increased traffic and an inability to find parking in front of their places. And though the apartments are intended for those with a bicycle-first mentality, most of the new



A four-story, 81-unit apartment building under construction at right shares a quiet side street with older houses in Portland, Ore. The unit will include scores of bicycle racks but no parking spaces for cars.  
DON RYAN/AP

tenants are not choosing a car-free existence. "The developer says he is trying to give Portland what it says it wants, but in reality, Portland wants it both ways," said John Golden, a high school teacher trying to stop, or at least reduce, the size of another four-story apartment building in the works near his northeast Portland house. Sackhoff, who declined to be interviewed, is the developer on that project, too.

Portland has carefully charted a course that has made it one of the most environmentally friendly urban areas in the country. The zoning rules and planning goals that spawned the surge in parking-free apartments were meant to discourage people from owning cars and also entice developers to build apartments closer to downtown, limiting the type of farm-

land-devouring sprawl seen in many U.S. metropolitan areas.

Mayor Charlie Hales was on the City Council in 2002 when it approved a zoning change that allowed housing to be constructed without parking if it's within 500 feet of a bus or light-rail stop with frequent service. That's defined as an arrival every 20 minutes. "It is a good thing that we're building up and not out," Hales said. "But we also have to be pragmatic in the present day. People still own cars."

The city's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability has proposed that developers of larger apartment buildings — those with at least 40 units — include at least one parking space for every four units. Hales said he has yet to decide if that's the right target.

City leaders want to see no-parking

buildings in neighborhoods with a mix of residential and commercial structures, so people can be a quick walk or bike ride away from restaurants, coffee shops and grocery stores. A survey of residents in the parking-free buildings found that 72 percent own cars, but only half that many drive to work. They keep a vehicle for trips across town or weekend getaways.

"People move to Portland for the quality of life," said Elisabeth Varga, who lives near a proposed 81-unit apartment building and was among people who filed an Appeals Board complaint. She emphasized that she and other opponents favor density, as long as it's done responsibly.

"Part of quality of life is being able to access your streets," she said, "and not be towered over by a monster of a building."