

## Camacho, Rudy

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**From:** Lorax Forster <loraxforster@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 25, 2016 9:06 AM  
**To:** PRC  
**Subject:** upload letter to comment section of 6726 Greenwood Ave N site  
**Attachments:** First 6726 Greenwood Ave N letter LAK 20160117.pdf

Please upload the attached letter to the 6726 Greenwood Ave N site.

Thank you,  
Laura Koutsky

TO: Seattle City Council Member Mike O'Brien  
Seattle DPD Staff Member Michael Dorcy

FROM: Laura Koutsky <loraxforster@gmail.com>

DATE: January 17, 2015

RE: 6726 Greenwood Ave N project – on-site parking must be included

I live near the 55+ small efficiency dwelling unit (SEDU) building planned for 6726 Greenwood Ave N. This site, which is on top of Phinney Ridge, has spectacular views of the Cascade Mountains and Green Lake. Neighbors have been told that this SEDU project will provide affordable housing with no parking and yet, none of the available documents indicate that developers will build affordable housing or participate in the Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) program. Actually, it makes a lot of sense for this project to stay out of MFTE program constraints because its prime view location could easily support market rate rents – currently above \$1,250/mo versus the required MFTE rate of \$628/mo (and the commitment to keep rents tied to 40% of area medium income for 12 years).<sup>1</sup> Even if these developers choose to participate in the city's MFTE affordable housing program, 75% of units do not need to be “affordable”<sup>2</sup> and most likely will rent for the going market-rate. Although no on-site parking for the 55+units is currently planned, best estimates (assuming 25% of units are “affordable”) show that about 50% of the building's residents will have cars.<sup>3</sup> It is unfair to expect the area's current businesses and residents to compete for scarce parking spots with everyone else moving to the area in the future.

Increasing overall housing stock is the best way to create more affordable housing. While I favor using the urban village concept to increase Seattle's housing density, such increases must be based on a realistic vision of the role that cars will play in the city's future. As discussed below, assuming that virtually none of the future inhabitants of residential urban villages will own cars is wishful thinking that is at odds with evidence showing that lots of cars and possibly even more cars will be part of Seattle's landscape for years to come.

Despite substantial increases in Seattle's transit ridership<sup>4</sup>, car sales are not declining, they are increasing<sup>5,6</sup>. At present, about 82% of Seattle households have at least one car or truck, and about 30% have two or more.<sup>7</sup> Virtually all of Seattle's Millennials and X-geners (90%+) report that a car, truck, or motorcycle is their preferred mode of transportation<sup>8</sup>, a finding that might partially explain why the number of cars is increasing faster than number of residents in Seattle's most walkable, young professional, and transit-friendly urban villages/centers including Capitol Hill, East Lake, First Hill, and downtown.<sup>6</sup> Thankfully, many people are choosing to use public transportation and drive less, but most still want a car for emergencies, transiting east-west corridors, running multiple errands, trips to IKEA, and traveling the great outdoors.

All these cars need parking spots. Our streets, which are becoming increasingly dense and dangerous with bus, bicycle, pedestrian, car and commercial truck traffic (and parking), cannot be expected to provide every additional parking spot for cars belonging to individuals living in one of the many new multi-unit buildings planned for urban villages. The oft-repeated argument that these parking needs should be shifted to adjacent single-family neighborhoods because such neighborhoods have enjoyed free on-street parking<sup>8</sup> is based on false information. Homeowners do not own the street, parking strip, or sidewalk in front of their houses but, they are required to maintain them. Cracked and unsafe sidewalks must be repaired or re-installed by homeowners. Street gutters, drains, grass and shrubs are the responsibility of homeowners, as are the trees, which must be kept trimmed to meet city code and replaced if removed for any reason. Litter, garbage, and dog poop (left by any person or animal) are picked up and disposed of by homeowners.

When it comes to parking needs in residential urban villages, consideration must be given to the configuration of each particular village. The Greenwood/Phinney Residential Urban Village is unique. Whereas 28 of the city's 30 urban villages/centers are clustered around a core of intersecting streets, the Greenwood/Phinney Residential Urban Village is mainly a single three-quarter mile stretch of Greenwood /Phinney Ave N, a place where "circling the block (s) for parking" always means circling through crowded and narrow residential streets -

streets with poor visibility at intersections because the ridge drops off steeply on both sides. These residential neighborhoods already share on-street parking spots with vehicles belonging to non-residents who come to enjoy the shops, restaurants, lake, Phinney Neighborhood Center and other public venues. Additional spots are used by commuters who drive to our neighborhood, park their cars and catch the bus downtown.

While research shows that Seattle's multi-unit residential buildings have had an overstock of parking spaces<sup>9</sup> – averaging 1.4 parking stalls/unit when an average of 1 stall/unit was being utilized, it is critical to keep in mind that 1 used stall does not equal zero used stalls and that the 0.4 unused stalls in one neighborhood (such as downtown) does not help alleviate parking woes in other neighborhoods. The longer-term outcome of allowing zero stalls/unit in residential urban villages (or, unconscionably allowing no new stalls and removing at least 6 currently available stalls as is the case for the 6726 Greenwood Ave N project plan) will be more accidents, pointless delays, and angry less healthy people as drivers roam residential streets in their quest for parking. New multi-unit buildings in the Greenwood/Phinney Residential Urban Village must provide parking – not too much, not too little – just the right amount.

So how much is “just the right amount” ? Fortunately, Seattle was the focus of a recent \$1,200,000 comprehensive study of multi-family residential parking needs.<sup>9</sup> Information from this study was used to develop a calculator for estimating parking stall requirements for different locations under different conditions ([rightsizeparking.org](http://rightsizeparking.org)).<sup>3</sup> Using this tool to calculate on-site parking needs for the exact location of the 6726 Greenwood Ave N project provided estimates that ranged from about 0.40 stalls/unit (22 stalls/57 units) to 0.81 stalls/unit (46 stalls/57 units). The variation in estimates corresponds to the use of different reasonable inputs for the number, size, rental price, and “affordability” of the residential units, and whether or not parking is bundled with unit rent. None of these calculations indicated that zero parking stalls/unit was a sensible choice.

If at some point in the distant future a significant portion of the city's residents do stop owning cars, unused parking stalls can be rented as storage units, which appear to be in great

demand as several new aesthetically challenged self-storage buildings are popping up all over the city.

The Greenwood/Phinney Neighborhood Design Guidelines of 2013<sup>10</sup> strongly recommend that below-grade or in-structure parking be included in new multi-unit buildings that are located on corners, as is the 6726 building. Additionally, one of the five important core values described in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan for Managing Growth 2015-2035<sup>11</sup> is the development of residential urban villages that retain the character of their less dense, adjacent single-family neighborhoods. The pedestrian, family, bicycle and local-business friendly character of the Greenwood/Phinney neighborhoods will be destroyed if they are required to serve as parking lots for new multi-unit structures built along the thin strip of residential urban village that is Greenwood/Phinney Ave. N. between N. 65<sup>th</sup> and N. 83<sup>rd</sup> streets.

## References

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5. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/us-car-sales-hit-record-high-in-2015/2016/01/05/363aaf30-af14-11e5-b820-eea4d64be2a1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/us-car-sales-hit-record-high-in-2015/2016/01/05/363aaf30-af14-11e5-b820-eea4d64be2a1_story.html)
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