

## Study calls for reforms to parking minimums to respond to housing affordability, changing trends

14.06.2019 [David Hains](#)

A new study is calling for comprehensive reform to parking policy in Toronto, saying that Ontario's biggest city needs to get with the times and respond to trends in how people will use cars in the coming years.

The study, from Ryerson Urban Analytics' **Murtaza Haider** and commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), found that the outdated parking policy in Toronto does not respond to the city's current built form and increasing flooding pressures, and that introducing new policies could help alleviate pressure on the sky-high real estate prices.

"The minimum parking requirements for downtown Toronto have been largely unchanged since 1986," the study states. "Changes in transportation technology and services, characterized by ride-hailing and car-sharing, and emerging technologies — including various levels of automation — necessitate a thorough review of Toronto's parking and related regulatory standards."

Parking is frequently a thorny local issue, with many neighbourhood groups and business improvement areas preferring more rather than less. But Haider warns that comes with a cost.

"We run the risk of overbuilding parking spaces that could become redundant in the short-term," he told *QP Briefing*, defining short-term as up to 20 years from now. He added that overbuilding parking spots can be especially negative in multi-residential buildings in the downtown core, where many residents walk or take transit and building out the additional underground real estate can add \$80,000–\$100,000 to the cost of already prohibitively expensive condo units.

He put forward the policy solution that more parking should go above-ground, where it is cheaper to build, avoids some flooding concerns and comes with added flexibility that the storeys can be converted to retail units depending on evolving parking demand.

Haider added that such an initiative should result in a "noticeable reduction in the cost" of condo units, although he declined to put a dollar estimate on the possible savings.

A spokesperson for Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing **Steve Clark** said that the ministry is in the process of reviewing the study's findings. But **Julie O'Driscoll** seemed to leave the ball in the court of Ontario cities. "Parking minimums are set by local municipalities. Our focus will continue to be on intensifying housing around major transit station areas," she stated to *QP Briefing*.

The RCCAO, which commissioned Haider's study, is eager to see changes to parking minimums.

"We were hearing from some of our members in the development community that there were issues," Executive Director **Andy Manahan** told *QP Briefing*. He cited "incredible costs" that come with constructing underground parking spots that run five or six storeys deep. But he also sees an opportunity for alignment with provincial government policies, as regulatory changes designed to make it easier and cheaper to build housing has been a theme for the Tories. "This is basically Steve Clark's modus operandi right now," he said.

Support for the contents of the Ryerson/RCCAO study extends beyond the participants.

The Toronto Region Board of Trade backed the thrust of the study, too, with vice-president of public affairs **Brian Kelcey** saying it's time to throw the kitchen sink of policy tools at tackling housing affordability. "We have an urgent enough housing crisis," described Kelcey, who urged the need for action.

He noted that municipal parking regulations are largely "old and obsolete" and the types of changes recommended are consistent with best practices elsewhere. "This is becoming a routine step in American jurisdictions," Kelcey, who keeps tabs on municipal policy developments throughout the world, added.