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Maine   Yes. Google's good here.

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Impact fees for parking garages?

Christian MilNeil <c.neal.milneil@gmail.com>   Wed, Sep 19, 2018 at 3:55 PM
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Thanks Nell, I understand where you are coming from w/r/t not charging impact fees to new parking garages, but I don't agree with the reasoning.

Parking garages are a land use and they are almost always subsidized – and subsidies for automobile use naturally generate more automobile trips.

We know intuitively and by observation that a 7-11 surrounded by a big, free parking lot generates more car traffic than a Rosemont Market, even though the square footages are roughly the same and the buildings' uses, from a zoning standpoint, are identical. The Bangor Savings Bank branch on Middle Street is the same land use as the Bangor Savings Bank branch on outer Brighton Avenue, but the Old Port location has virtually no impact to traffic because there is no parking there and it's been designed for walk-in traffic; the Brighton location does have a traffic impact because it's designed to privilege access for motorists. We drive to the Maine Mall because it's surrounded by parking lots, and we walk to Reny's because parking is scarce on Congress Street and the pedestrian and transit connections are excellent.

The planning department needs to bear in mind that impact fees have an important function beyond financing infrastructure projects: ideally, they could also offer a financial incentive for developers to reduce the impact of their projects; to build fewer parking lots and more transit-oriented, walkable neighborhoods where cars don't get used as much.

In its current form, the proposed ordinance will make smart growth even more expensive, and more development will go out to Westbrook and Scarborough instead, and we'll end up back at square one, with increasing traffic and none of the money we need to deal with it.

So, instead of assuming that every housing development is going to generate car traffic with a one-size-fits-all approach we have here, we could have a tiered system of impact fees such that a car-oriented development with lots of parking pays more, and a transit-oriented development that gives its tenants bus passes pays less (or not at all), and thus give developers a financial incentive to build more of the latter.

The city already acknowledges, through its transportation demand management policies, that developers can and do reduce their traffic impacts with project design and property management strategies; the prior use of TDM plans undermines the city's argument that traffic impacts are a blind function of land use multiplied by the dreary transportation mode shares of our status quo. In fact, developers' TDM plans themselves could be used as a better proxy for a development's traffic impacts, since the TDM plans explicitly set a developer's expectations for how their tenants will travel, and how much they will subsidize parking.

From a political point of view, a lot of Portlanders are upset about how much parking garage construction is happening right now downtown. It's a clear, visible demonstration of how the city and landlords are willing to spend lots of money to subsidize private parking, even as the city's public streets strain under increasing traffic congestion. This is a clear "tragedy of the commons" situation – every new parking space makes driving slightly more convenient for one motorist but incrementally increases congestion for everyone else – that demands a stronger public policy response. Impact fees would be a good place to start: a financial nudge to encourage developers to internalize the broader traffic impacts of their parking management decisions.

I'd appreciate it if you could share this message with the planning board as public comment tomorrow; I may try to attend the meeting in person as well.

A couple of other more technical points:

- Figure 24 in the memo seems to assume that the mode share for transit, walking and biking will remain constant (and miserably low) through 2028. Don't we have city goals that say we want more transit market share, and less motor vehicle use over time? Isn't shifting mode share the point of many of these infrastructure projects we want to fund? It's discouraging to see a city planning document assume failure in those ambitions, which some of us

consider pretty important!

- Mode share estimates in Table 19 seem to come from the FHWA's Household Travel Survey (https://nhts.ornl.gov/). We should be skeptical of those figures; that survey has a very small sample size (only 250 respondents from the entire state of Maine – source) that likely discounts Portland's uniquely high transit service and walkability relative to other small cities.

  The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, by contrast, surveyed 15,423 households in Maine in its 2017 survey, so it's much, much more robust. The ACS estimates that Portland's citywide transit mode share for commuting trips is 3.2% – twice as high as TischlerBise's assumed mode share, and transit ridership is growing.

- Furthermore, we know from Census tract-level estimates that mode share also varies by neighborhood, significantly. Bayside (in Census Tract 6) has a transit mode share of 9.9% and a walk/bike share of 40% for commuting trips. By the logic of this memo, a project located in Bayside should pay a significantly lower impact fee than a project located in Riverton if we use the more reliable, more statistically robust ACS data.

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