



**The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

C O U N C I L R E P O R T

September 2, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Salvatore Marchese – Junior Planner
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services
RE: A-8-25-Z – Parking Amendments

PURPOSE

The applicant, the City of Sault Ste. Marie (c/o Planning Division) is seeking Council approval of a City-initiated application of parking amendments to Zoning By-law 2005-150 to revise and update parking regulations throughout the City. The proposed amendments will be City-wide unless otherwise specified.

PROPOSED CHANGE

The applicant, the City of Sault Ste. Marie, is seeking the following amendments to parking provisions contained in Zoning By-law 2005-150 and include in summary:

- Reducing minimum parking requirements by varying degrees based on location in the Downtown, other Strategic Development Areas, and the remainder of the City, more specifically:
 - Strategic Development Area – First Neighbourhoods – 40% reduction for non-residential uses and a 60% reduction for residential uses. In addition, small-scale developments (residential and non-residential) will not have a minimum parking requirement.
 - Strategic Development Areas – Other – 40% for non-residential uses and 25% reduction for residential uses.
 - Remainder of the City – 20% reduction for non-residential uses and no change to residential uses.
- A map change to identify Strategic Development Areas;
- Updates to barrier-free parking, including revised calculations for the number of spaces, and amendments to the overall design of spaces;
- Adding minimum bicycle parking requirements for larger-scale developments;
- Requiring electric vehicle charging infrastructure to be put in place for new, larger-scale residential developments – EV Readiness; and
- Minor housekeeping amendments to parking provisions to provide greater clarity.

A complete list of amendments is attached as Appendix A.

BACKGROUND

In the second quarter of 2022, the City received Provincial Streamline Development Approval Funding (SDAF) of \$1,750,000 to be used for a number of projects to streamline development approvals. As part of that funding \$58,500 was allocated towards a review of parking provisions with the goal of reducing and modernizing parking requirements to reduce development costs, increase development densities, unlock development potential, and facilitate a modal shift towards active transportation.

This funding was used to hire a consultant, CIMA+, to carry out a study of parking requirements in the Downtown. In addition to an analysis of supply and demand, the study compared 13 municipalities for other parking practices and made recommendations for policy changes in the municipality.

To supplement this study, Planning staff have conducted further research into comparable municipalities and leading parking trends being implemented throughout both Canada and the United States. These were used to complement the research by CIMA+. This work forms the basis of the proposed changes to the City's Zoning By-law.

In June 2025, a parking report was brought to City Council that included the study that was completed by CIMA+¹. Staff reported that an additional parking open house would be held before bringing back final recommendations for changes to parking provisions of Zoning By-law 150.

ANALYSIS

Conformity with Official Plan

The following policies support development standards that allow for efficient use of land and support infill development that in turn can lower overall costs of bringing developments to market. Parking reforms also support increasing development densities and facilitate a modal shift away from auto dependence.

Therefore, the following Official Plan policies are being met and support the recommended zoning amendments:

¹ https://saultstemarie.ca/Cityweb/media/City-Clerk/Council-Agendas/2025/Merged-Agenda-Package-Regular-Council-Meeting_Jun23_2.pdf?ext=.pdf (pg. 209-311)

Affordable Housing

With the overall goal of encouraging and supporting the creation of additional affordable housing units, the City shall ensure that a minimum of 30% of all dwelling units throughout the community are affordable by:

Policy d. Supporting innovative housing design, such as smaller units (tiny homes) and alternative development standards such as reduced lot frontages, setbacks and parking requirements.

Energy Policies

E.4 – Alternative Transportation and energy efficient forms of transportation such as public transit, cycling, and walking shall be supported.

Reducing parking for motor vehicles encourages the use of alternative forms of transportation. The proposed amendments also require EV readiness and bicycle parking.

Commercial Policies

C.8 – New development and redevelopment proposals should consider surrounding residential uses. Priority should be given to mixed land use projects. New development should be designed to maximize the use of existing parking in the Downtown.

C.10 – Commercial parking requirements may be lower in the Downtown than in others areas to reflect multi-purpose trips and greater transit usage.

By reducing parking requirements, existing surplus parking should see increased utilization. The proposed changes aim to make the largest reductions to parking in the Downtown as supported by C.10.

Transportation Policies

TR.6 – Alternative transportation modes will be considered as part of the development approval process for large-scale residential, commercial, institutional and industrial projects, and should include provisions for Public Transit, Pedestrian and Cycling travel.

The proposed changes introduce requirements to provide bicycle parking and EV ready spaces.

Conformity with Provincial Planning Statement 2024

2.1.6(a) – Planning authorities should support the achievement of *complete communities* by: accommodating an appropriate range and mix of land uses,

housing options, transportation options with *multimodal* access, employment, *public service facilities*, and other institutional uses (including schools and associated child care facilities, long-term care facilities, places of worship and cemeteries), recreation, parks and open space, and other uses to meet long-term needs.

Together with previous amendments to Zoning By-law 2005-150 (Gentle Density), the proposed parking reforms will further facilitate higher development densities, which supports alternative transportation options.

2.2.1(c) – Planning authorities shall provide for an appropriate range and mix of *housing options* and densities to meet projected needs of current and future residents of the *regional market area* by: promoting densities for new housing which efficiently use land, resources, *infrastructure*, and *public service facilities*, and support the use of *active transportation*.

Similar to creating complete communities in 2.1.6(a), this provision sets out similar needs to provide a mix of housing options and densities that effectively use land and resources. Reducing the land required for automobile storage creates the opportunity for developments to utilize a higher percentage of their land for housing and create additional units for those who do not require an automobile.

2.3.1.2(a/c) – Land use patterns within *settlement areas* should be based on *densities and a mix of land uses* which:

a. *efficiently use land and resources*

c. *support active transportation*.

This section builds on the usage of land to be more effective and supporting active transportation. This can be accomplished by better balancing pedestrian and automobile needs and creating higher density developments that have easier and closer access to services.

2.9.1.d – Planning authorities shall plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for the *impacts of a changing climate* through approaches that: promote *green infrastructure*, *low impact development*, and *active transportation*, protect the environment and improve air quality.

Reducing parking requirements encourages alternate forms of transportation, which often include environmentally friendly activities such as bicycling or walking.

Therefore, the recommended zoning amendments are consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement.

Conformity with Growth Plan for Northern Ontario 2011

Implementing requirements for a variety of different types of vehicle parking encourages and allows citizens to use other forms of travel that include bicycles, scooters, and electrical vehicles. These forms of travel have an additional benefit of reducing emissions over the use of traditional fuel powered vehicles.

Therefore, the recommended zoning amendments do not conflict with the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario

4.3.3(e) – Providing a range of transportation options.

5.3.2(f) – Reduce emissions and other environmental impacts associated with transportation.

COMMENTS

Please refer to Appendix A, for a detailed outline of proposed amendments.

Amendment 1 – Map Change – Establish Strategic Development Areas

In order to apply different parking ratios to various parts of the City, the Strategic Development Areas, outlined in the Official Plan, are being used as the basis for the proposed reductions. This complements the housing initiatives that also look to steer growth to these areas, which are well serviced and have access to amenities within close proximity.

Amendment 2 – Barrier-Free Symbol

This amendment proposes (Section 5.5.1) to regulate the specific location of the barrier-free symbol and the dimensions that are to be used. These updates are to improve visibility of barrier-free spots and bring consistency to how they are marked in parking lots.

The changes establish a 1.5m (4.92ft) by 1.5m (4.92ft) standard emblem to be placed on a blue background with white paint on top. This symbol will be located at the bottom (entrance) of the barrier-free stall to allow drivers to see the symbol more clearly. Please see the diagram in Appendix A under *Amendment 2* for further clarification.

Amendment 3 – Changes to Required Barrier-Free Parking Requirements for Non-Residential Uses

This amendment (Section 4.4.2) aligns barrier-free parking requirements with the provincial *Design of Public Spaces Standard (DOPS)*. This amendment also ensures:

- In light of the proposed parking reductions, barrier-free parking requirements are proposed to be amended to ensure there are ample barrier-free spaces, especially for larger developments where proposed reduced parking standards are more substantial. For smaller developments, where the impact of parking reductions is less substantial, the proposed barrier-free parking ratios result in similar barrier-free parking requirements to current by-law.
- For larger developments, an additional provision requiring a percentage of spaces to be barrier-free helps to manage the gap between the ranges of provided parking spaces.
- The number of barrier-free parking spaces is proposed to be based on the provided number of parking spaces, as opposed to the minimum required number of parking spaces.

This amendment will ensure there is an adequate supply of barrier-free spaces in developments with parking in excess of the minimum requirements.

Amendment 4 – Additional Barrier-Free Parking Spaces Required for Specific Uses

This amendment adds a new provision (Section 5.5.2.1) to increase barrier-free parking requirements for specific uses that have been identified as demanding a greater barrier-free requirement. For these uses 5% of the provided parking spaces will be required to be barrier-free.

This amendment strikes a balance between identifying a standard barrier-free parking rate and taking into account uses that may be utilized by a higher percentage of those with disabilities.

Amendment 5 – Exception to Barrier-Free Parking Space Requirements for Certain Residential Uses

This amendment proposes (Section 5.5.4) to provide clarity where individual dwelling units are accessed via individual driveways, such as single detached and multiple attached dwellings, and other small-scale residential uses.

It is proposed that barrier-free parking requirements be removed for these types of developments. This amendment rectifies a situation where larger developments with private driveways would be subject to barrier-free parking requirements. In most cases a private driveway space can accommodate someone with a disability without limiting the spot to only barrier-free users.

Amendment 6 – Reduction to Minimum Parking Requirements

The purpose of this amendment is to reduce existing parking requirements for residential and non-residential uses. The zoning by-law amendment will create three parking requirements based on location in the City. General parking reductions are as follows:

1. Residential Parking Requirements:
 - a. Strategic Development Area (First Neighbourhoods and Downtown) – No requirements for the first 4 dwelling units then 0.5 spaces per dwelling unit thereafter.
 - b. Strategic Development Areas (Other, not including the Downtown) – Reduce from 1 to 0.75 spaces per unit – 25% reduction.
 - c. Remainder of the City – 1 space per dwelling unit – no change from current.
2. Non-Residential Requirements:
 - a. Strategic Development Areas (First Neighbourhoods and Downtown) – 40% reduction from current requirements for all non-residential uses. Where non-residential parking requirements are based upon area, the first 450m² (4,844ft²) of development need not provide any parking.
 - b. Strategic Development Areas (Other, not including the Downtown) – 40 % reduction.
 - c. Remainder of the City – 20% reduction.

For clarity, it is important to note that for new small-scale development in the Downtown, the interpretation is intended to be that expansions to existing buildings of up to 450m², or the addition of up to four new dwelling units to an existing residential development, also benefit from the proposed amendment. For example:

- An existing 300m² building proposes a 300m² expansion – There is no minimum parking requirement for the 300m² expansion.
- An existing three-unit residential building is expanded to accommodate four additional dwelling units – There is no minimum parking requirement for the four new dwelling units.

These reductions have been determined from a dual analysis that included the CIMA+ parking study, which analyzed parking in the Downtown; and work carried out by staff that looked at comparable municipalities for their best practices. Both studies conclude that there is a surplus of parking in the City, and that the proposed parking reductions are in line with comparable municipalities.

It should be noted that the required minimum parking gives the baseline for what must be provided on-site. Should the owner of a property decide they need more than what is required by the Zoning by-law, they have the ability to do so.

Amendment 7 – Electric Vehicle (EV) Readiness

For larger residential developments this amendment (Section 5.8) proposes requiring a minimum of 20% of required parking spaces to be EV ready, meaning conduit is installed and capable of being electrified to facilitate EV charging stations in the future. Such requirements would not apply where existing buildings are being converted to residential or new residential units are being added to existing buildings. During consultation, developers indicated that running conduit during construction would be a low-cost addition, as opposed to retrofitting, should customers demand EV chargers in the future.

Amendment 8 – Bicycle Parking Requirements

This amendment proposes a new provision (Section 5.9) to implement minimum bicycle parking requirements for larger developments and permits bike parking to be located within a required non-barrier free parking space. Further, dimensions for a bicycle space and requirements for providing secure storage are included.

As a result of agency circulation, Building Division indicated that dimensions for bicycle parking spaces are required. Planning has developed dimensions for each bicycle space as well as ensuring that bicycle parking spaces are provided in a manner that allows bicycles to be secured. This can be accommodated through a 'bike rack' or bike locker. These changes are shown below:

5.9.2 Bicycle Parking Dimensions

A bicycle parking space shall meet the following minimum requirements

- A. Length of 1.8 metres;
- B. Width of 0.6 metres.

5.9.3 Securing Bicycles

Bicycle parking shall provide the ability for users to safely store their bicycle by one of the following methods:

- A. A bicycle storage room or cage with a locking door and controlled access;
- B. A bicycle locker or container, sized to accommodate one bicycle and is lockable by the user;
- C. A bicycle rack, ring, post, or U-stand that enables secure locking of the frame and at least one wheel; and is anchored to ground or building structure.

Amendment 9 – Surface Treatment Requirements

The amendment proposes (Section 5.2.2) that all parking spaces be paved, as opposed to just required parking spaces.

Upon further review, where parking areas are to be paved, the current wording of Section 5.2.2, specifically requires catch basins and underground storm sewers, which may not be feasible or possible where developments do not have access to a storm sewer. Therefore, this specific wording is proposed to be removed and can be generally managed through the site plan control process.

The proposed section now reads as follows:

5.2.2 Surface Treatment of Parking Areas

Unless otherwise noted in this By-law, all parking areas shall be constructed with a concrete or asphalt surface on top of a proper granular base.

Amendment 10 – Parking Spaces on Neighbouring Lots

The purpose of this amendment is to permit uses within Institutional Zones to benefit from parking on a neighbouring lot. Furthermore, the amendment proposes to remove ‘apartment building’, which is no longer a defined term in the Zoning by-law, and replace it with Residential Structure containing at least 5 units. Allowing parking on neighbouring lots to benefit development in Low Density R3 Zone is also proposed.

Amendment 11 – Revised Definition of ‘The Downtown’ for Parking Purposes

The current definition in the Zoning By-law for ‘The Downtown’ is not consistent with that of the ‘Strategic Development Area – First Neighbourhoods’, which includes the Jamestown neighbourhood in addition to the defined ‘Downtown’.

On May 13, 2024, Council approved OPA 252 to establish the Strategic Development Areas planning framework in the Official Plan. From a zoning standpoint, the proposed parking reforms represent the first implementation of the Strategic Development Areas.

The proposed amendment below is intended to be transitional and only applicable to the Parking Section of the Zoning By-law. In the near future, a series of amendments will be brought forward proposing to repeal the definition and references to the downtown and replace them with ‘Strategic Development Area – First Neighbourhoods’.

The proposed section shall read as follows:

5.10 Interpretation ‘The Downtown’

Notwithstanding the definition of ‘Downtown’ found in Section 2.9, for the purposes of Section 5 – Parking Regulations, ‘Downtown’ shall refer to ‘Strategic Development Area – First Neighbourhoods’.

CONSULTATION

Public notice was posted on the City's website and advertised in the Sault Star on August 9, 2025. As this is a City-wide application, no physical notices were mailed out.

There have been a total of seven public open houses related to parking reforms.

In association with the CIMA+ study, two open houses were held November 1 and 2, 2023 at the John Rhodes Community Centre and the Grand Theatre. The Downtown Association membership was invited to participate at the Grand Theatre session. As part of the *Grow the Sault* initiative, four information sessions were held in November 2023, which included a discussion on parking reforms. On July 28, 2025, staff held a public open house to discuss the specific proposed parking amendments.

All sessions were advertised in SooToday, social media, and on the City's website.

Feedback from public consultation was generally positive. One specific concern related to the originally proposed removal of all minimum parking requirements in the Downtown. Several individuals felt this was going too far. In response, the initial approach has been altered to maintain minimum parking requirements for medium and larger scale developments in the Downtown, albeit at a reduced rate from current requirements.

Between August 11 and 13, 2025, the City administered a FlashVote survey, which included 259 participants of the 456 of those who were initially invited, resulting in a margin of error of +/-6%. The results of the can be found by here: [Parking - Survey results - Sault Ste. Marie, ON - FlashVote](https://www.flashvote.com/sault-ste-marie-on/surveys/parking-08-25)²

Of the respondents, 42% felt that it was either somewhat or very easy to find parking in the downtown. 29% of respondents felt that it was either somewhat or very hard to find parking in the Downtown. Finally, 28% of respondents were 'ok' with finding parking, which represents a neutral opinion. Therefore, a little over 2/3 of respondents do not perceive a parking issue.

41% of frequent users of downtown parking (more than once per week) felt that finding parking was hard, whereas 48% of occasional users (once a week to once a month) felt that parking was easy to find. Interestingly, 76% of frequent users would prefer to park as close as possible to their destination, even if it takes longer to find a space, meaning they tend to be more selective in where they park, in comparison to more infrequent users.

The result of the FlashVote survey generally supports staff's analysis that there is ample parking the Downtown, keeping in mind the psychology of parking, where perception does not often match reality.

² <https://www.flashvote.com/sault-ste-marie-on/surveys/parking-08-25>

Public Comments

At the time of drafting this report, no public comments have been received by Planning Staff.

Application Circulation

As part of the application review, this proposal was circulated to City divisions and external agencies for detailed technical review and comment. All of the responses, except for Building Division, were that there are no objections or comments to the application.

Building Division responded with a recommendation that bicycle parking space dimensions be identified. As discussed above (Amendment 8), dimensions and methods of securing a bicycle have been proposed to address this comment. Further, Building Division would like to ensure that a process is in place to ensure that various stakeholders can find Strategic Development Areas. Like any other map change, the internal and public facing GIS systems will be amended to clearly delineate the location of the Strategic Development Areas.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Approval of this application will not result in any incremental changes to municipal finances; however, it can be extrapolated that impacts from these initiatives, such as greater densities raising taxes, and increased public parking usage, will lead to additional revenues to the municipality.

STRATEGIC PLAN / POLICY IMPACT

The Vision of the Corporate Strategic Plan speaks to innovation and efficiency. The proposed parking amendments are intended to modernize parking requirements, unlock development potential, and allow for a more efficient use of land, including private and public parking lots. The Quality of Life focus area speaks to Downtown revitalization initiatives. The proposed parking reductions in the Downtown, which have been revised due to public concerns, are intended to support more development in the Downtown, which will bring more people Downtown and increase the overall tax base.

The Environmental focus area speaks to active transportation implementation and the Community Green House Reduction Plan. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan identifies personal vehicle use as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Parking reductions and recommended requirements for bicycle parking and electric vehicle readiness in association with larger developments will result in higher-density development and help facilitate active transportation implementation and a modal shift away from automobile dependence.

SUMMARY

The changes proposed to the existing provisions of Zoning By-law 2005-150 represent an update that reflects current practices across North America, including similarly sized cities with a winter climate.

A-8-25-Z Parking Amendment

September 2, 2025

Page 3.

It is recognized that the proposed amendments are a bold step within the local context. The proposed amendments represent a new vision and a new approach to parking, which aims to increase development densities and unlock additional development potential. Once implemented, these changes will be closely monitored and can be adjusted as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Junior Planner dated September 2, 2025 concerning application A-8-25-Z Parking Amendments be received and that Council approve the amendments listed in Appendix A; and that the Legal Department be requested to prepare the necessary by-law(s) to effect the same.

Respectfully submitted,

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