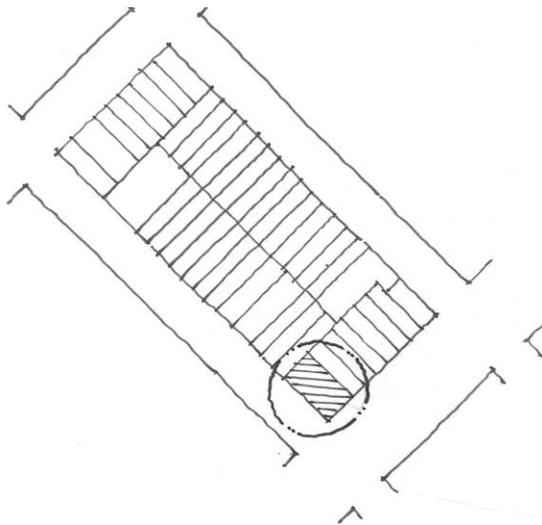

Taking Advantage of Corner Lots to Provide Housing and Neighborhood Amenities in Residential and Neighborhood Commercial District

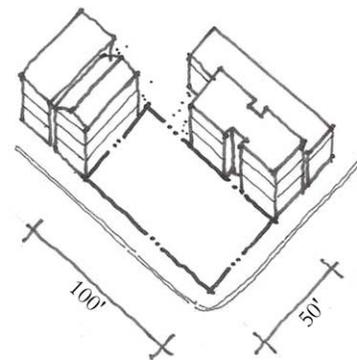
Issue Paper, February 2002

As part of the Citywide Action Plan (CAP) and its Better Neighborhoods Program, the Planning Department has presented ideas to encourage housing in transit and service-rich areas. In places where the proximity of transit and services makes it viable for people to live with fewer cars, the department suggests revising density, parking and other requirements of the planning code to make it easier to develop housing that makes the most of its location.

In this context, corner lots offer a unique set of opportunities. Corner lots enjoy sun and air access via two aspects which allows for far more efficient site plans; when well designed, they create notable landmarks within commercial districts and neighborhoods. Because they can be accessed via side streets, parking can be accessed without detracting from commercial streets or slowing transit service. Because they are enclosed by buildings on either side, they can comfortably accommodate more development without detracting from midblock open spaces.



A typical corner lot in context.



Corner lots need to be at least 50' x 100' to accommodate extra housing and other amenities.

Existing zoning and planning controls do not take advantage of the opportunities offered by corner lots. What follows are ideas for revising these controls to realize the potential of corner lots to 1) provide additional housing in keeping with the context of surrounding properties, and 2) provide amenities such as bike parking and carshare for the neighborhood, reducing the need for parking on interior lots.

The following controls would apply to corner lots greater than 5,000 sf. Provided that a lot is large enough, more housing units can be built on a corner lot than existing controls allow without compromising access to sunlight and air. To gain these efficiencies, lots need to have an area of at least 5,000 square feet.

Proposals for additional height and reduced density maximums are limited to building area within 75' of the block corner to discourage the assembly of parcels. Parcel assembly is not permitted if it would result in a single lot larger than 10,000 squarefeet.

Corner lots in districts other than NC-1 and RH-1:

- **Reduce residential density maximum to 1 unit per 750 sf. of lot area. (A)**
- **Allow 100% lot coverage, do not require a ground floor rear yard in exchange for one bike parking space for every 2 units and one parking space per 10 units dedicated to Carshare. (B)**
- **Revise common open space requirements to eliminate the 25% lot area requirement for rear yards and encourage rooftop gardens. (C)**
- **Eliminate parking requirements and establish a parking maximum of one space per unit. Require that the cost of parking be separated from the cost of housing. (F)**

Corner lots in districts other than NC-1 and RH-1 and within 1250' of a transit preferential street:

All of the above, plus

- **Allow an additional 10' of height in 40' height zones and 15' in 65' height zones. (D)**
- **Require upper floors above base zoning to be setback 15' from adjacent property lines. (E)**
- **Reduce residential density maximum to 1 unit per 500 sf. of lot area (A).**
- **Establish a parking maximum of .75 spaces for every unit.**
- **Introduce new funding mechanisms to encourage shared parking with interior lots. (F)**

Corner lots in districts other than NC-1 and RH-1 and on a transit preferential street:

All of the above, plus

- **Reduce residential density maximum to 1 unit per 250 sf. of lot area. (A)**
- **Require a 30' parking setback and prohibit parking access from the main commercial or TPS street. (G)**

- **Permit sidewalk improvements to count toward a portion of open space requirement. (H)**
- **Establish a parking maximum of .5 spaces for every unit. (F)**

A: Reduce residential density maximums.

To maximize housing on corner lots, density maximums need to be reduced. In an existing NC-2 zone with a 40' height limit, for example, 6 units would be permitted on a 5,000 sf. lot, while 12 could easily be accommodated within the zoned building envelope, and 18 units could be accommodated with a 10' height increase.

Minor reductions to density maximums not only result in more units; they encourage buildings more in keeping with traditional San Francisco buildings types. A density maximum of 1 unit per 750 sf. is similar to those of three story San Francisco walk-ups; 1 unit per 250 sf. is similar to mid-rise apartment buildings common along larger streets. Along with other changes intended to encourage housing, reducing density maximums would make smaller sites attractive for development. To be effective, this reduction should be coupled with the changes to rear yard and parking requirements described.

B: Allow 100% lot coverage and do not require a ground floor rear yard in exchange for one bike parking space for every 2 units and one parking space per 10 units dedicated to Carshare.

A ground floor podium on a corner lot is almost entirely enclosed by adjacent properties. It makes sense to provide as much parking as possible in the podium, especially if it can be shared, can support alternative travel modes and otherwise offset the need for parking on non-corner lots. Revising Section 134 of the code to allow full lot coverage and not require a ground floor rear yard are essential. The effects of a full lot podium are minimal because it is a corner lot.

In exchange for allowing full lot coverage and no ground floor rear yard, a minimum of one "Class 2" bike parking space per 2 units (as per code section 155.1) should be provided and no less than 6 spaces total. One dedicated shared vehicle space should be provided per 10 units, and no less than one.¹ This would serve as an incentive for other new housing development in the area to provide less parking.

C: Revise common open space requirements to eliminate the 25% lot area requirement for rear yards and encourage rooftop gardens.

Existing open space requirements for corner lots permit the typical rear yard to be substituted with an area equal to 25% of the lot area and provided on the same level as the required rear yard (Section 134.C.). This control allows for development beyond the side facing the front property line but preserves mid-block open space and sun access to adjacent properties. To facilitate the development of more units within the building envelope, the 25% lot area requirement should be dropped. The existing requirement that the rear yard have minimum dimensions of 15' by 15' and be contiguous with the adjacent rear yard is

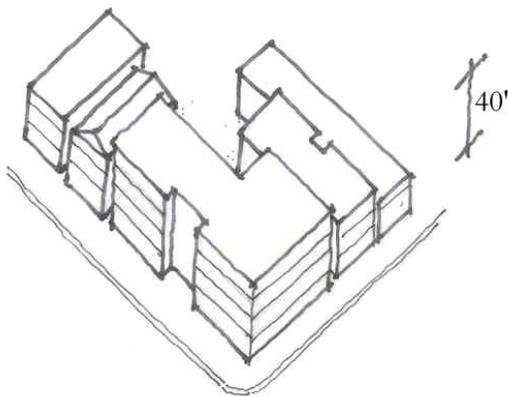
¹ "Shared vehicle space" would ideally be dedicated for use by San Francisco's Carshare program. In cases where Carshare is not feasible, space may be set aside for a private sharing enterprise between residents. In the latter case, the space should be provided free of charge. In all cases, shared vehicles should be available via membership, etc. to local residents.

adequate to ensure that rear yards on corner lots are compatible with surrounding rear yards. Other aspects of the rear yard requirement in Section 134.C should be retained.

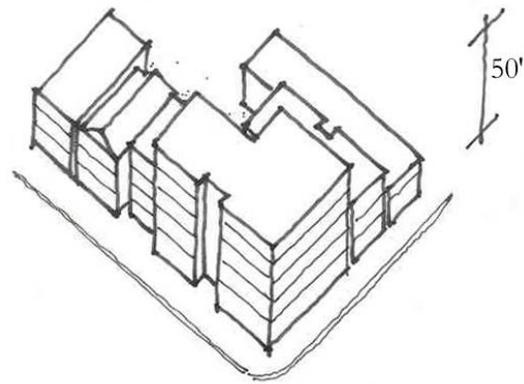
Rooftop gardens provide far more privacy and better access to sun and wind than open space in other common open space designs, especially inner courtyards. Rooftop gardens should be encouraged as the best way to accommodate the remaining open space not provided in the required rear yard.

D: Allow an additional 10' of height in 40' height zones not in or adjacent to RH-1 or NC-1 districts and 15' in 65' height zones.

Allowing higher heights on corner lots would increase the housing potential of corner lots dramatically. On a 50' x 100' lot with a 40-X height district, for example, 3 or 4 additional units would be possible by allowing 10 extra feet. Additional height is not appropriate in areas zoned for single family detached homes and other single story development. RH-1 and NC-1 districts have been exempted for this reason. This would require introducing an exemption from CU for projects above 40' in R districts (Section 253) for corner lots within 1250' of TPS streets.



Infill within the existing height envelope, allowing 100% lot coverage and reduced rear yard.



Infill with an additional 10' of height and required 15' setback at the rear, allowing 100% lot coverage and reduced rear yard.

Height bonuses should be tailored to maximize efficiency for a given construction type. In a 40-X district, for example, 3 stories of wooden stick-frame construction over a ground floor concrete podium would be typical. Allowing an additional 10' would allow a project to build an additional story over the podium, maximizing what is allowed by the building department and reaching what is considered the most economically efficient height for low-rise construction. Similarly, an additional 15' in a 65' height district means that a project can maximize efficiency below the life-safety height of 80', above which more expensive construction is required.

The marginal cost of an extra floor, provided it is within the same construction type, is relatively low. If the extra height were proposed as a bonus rather than 'as of right', units in the additional floor area could be required to be affordable.

E: Require floors above base zoning to be setback 15' from adjacent properties.

A setback should be required above the prevailing height of the surrounding area to ensure a gradual transition down to adjacent properties. Where height bonuses are allowed, any height above the existing zoned height should be setback at least 15' from the adjacent property at the rear of the lot, if adjacent properties are at or below the zoned height for the area.

F: Eliminate parking requirements and establish parking maximums. Require that the cost of parking be separated from rental or sale prices.

In the short term, developers should be given flexibility in how much parking they choose to provide, and encouraged to provide alternatives such as car-sharing, subsidized fast passes and parking as a separate cost from the housing. Parking requirements should be eliminated and a parking maximum of .75:1 should be established within 1250' of TPS streets; .5: 1 for lots on TPS streets. This would require a new entry to Section 1.5 for corner lot residential uses, as well as lifting the requirement that residential parking be provided on-site.

Where parking is provided, its cost to residents should be separate from the cost of housing. Allowing residents to pay less for housing without parking is essential to making life with fewer cars a viable option.

Introduce new funding mechanisms to encourage sharing with interior lots.

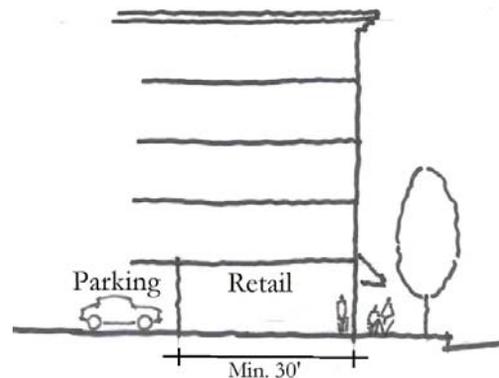
A shared parking system could be used to provide additional off-street parking on corner lots. The City could subsidize the construction of dedicated spaces for Carshare in new projects on corner lots and allow new projects on interior lots to pay parking fees in lieu of providing parking on-site. These fees could be used to recover the city's costs. On sites where underground parking is feasible, the city could subsidize the construction of underground parking and recover its cost through a similar in-lieu fee.

Parking requirements for new development on interior lots could be eliminated entirely. Conversions of existing parking in garages to accessory units could be allowed, provided that a Carshare pod or other shared vehicle facility is available within 800' of the proposed conversion.

G: Require a 30' parking setback and prohibit parking access from the main commercial or TPS street.

Because ground floor parking can be accessed via a side street, it makes sense to provide as much parking as possible at ground level in the rear of a podium on corner lots, and minimize parking on other lots where parking reduces housing and requires a curb cut on the main street.

Increasing the amount of ground floor space available for parking also frees up space at the front of the building for retail or other ground floor uses that contribute to the street. Facing the commercial or TPS street, parking access should be prohibited and the first 30' of building depth from the property line should be required retail or residential. This would be best introduced as a requirement for allowing full lot coverage, or could be applied to all lots on TPS streets.



H: Permit sidewalk improvements to count toward a portion of open space requirement.

There is a real need to improve sidewalks, crossings and other pedestrian amenities along TPS streets. In areas such as Rincon Hill, special controls have been established that allow a project to count improvements to sidewalks, such as widenings, arcades, bulbouts and street furniture, toward common open space requirements. Such improvements should be allowed to count toward 25% of open space requirements on corner lots on TPS streets, where pedestrian activity is most concentrated and crossings are located. (A fee for pedestrian improvements could be collected from all new housing and used to fund more dramatic improvements.) Language to this effect would need to be added to Section 249.1.(b) (2).