LATE AT NIGHT, WHEN CHICAGO SLEEPS, ONE THIRD OF APARTMENT PARKING SPOTS SIT EMPTY.

The cost of this wasted space is massive. Each indoor, underground parking space – one individual space – costs $37,300 to build. Multiply that by the number of spaces, pass on the costs to tenants, and that price tag has huge impacts on the affordability of housing.

When communities ask developers to build too much parking, those spaces add time and money to projects. They drive up construction costs and rents. And parking requirements hinder the development of affordable housing near transit because subsidy programs cannot account for the dual price premiums on parking and land.

**How much parking does Chicago really use?**

To answer, CNT applied its pioneering approach to determining parking demand. We visited 40 parking lots and garages at 4:00 a.m., when most renters have parked their cars and are asleep in bed. We found one third of those residential parking spots sitting empty.

Consistent with our research elsewhere, we discovered that:

- **The supply of parking exceeds demand.** Buildings offered two spots for every three units. In reality, they only needed one for every three.
- **As parking supply goes up, much of it sits empty.** Apartments with fewer spaces saw a greater percentage of their parking used.
- **Apartment buildings near frequent transit need less parking.** Buildings within ten minutes of a Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) train stop had one spot for every two units. Even then, one third of their spots sat empty.
- **The opportunity costs add up.** If we applied these numbers to a 100-unit building near the CTA system, the empty parking spaces would add up to $825,000 in wasted construction costs.

Municipalities often mandate at least one parking space per new housing unit, even for buildings near transit stops. But with so many costly parking spaces already sitting empty, communities and developers should rethink parking as a resource to be managed so that supply and demand can be more in sync. If that happens, we can expand the supply of market-rate housing, facilitate more affordable housing projects, and build neighborhoods that put people before the car.
HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to reduce parking in buildings and pass on the savings in more affordable rent. *Stalled Out* provides a toolkit of strategies to reduce parking that fit a variety of community and political contexts.

STRATEGY ONE:  
RIGHT SIZING PARKING REQUIREMENTS

Municipalities can change land use regulations to reduce the required amount of parking and ask for the inclusion of amenities that provide alternatives to the car. These options need to consider the transportation resources and walkability of a neighborhood, but in general they include:

- The reduction or elimination of parking requirements that leave it to individual developments to propose the right size of parking for a project.
- Credits for transportation alternatives like bicycle parking, car sharing, carpooling, and shared parking that reduce the demand for private parking spaces.
- Inclusionary upzoning that allow developments to reduce parking in a building in return for a set aside of affordable units on site.

STRATEGY TWO:  
REDUCING PARKING IN BUILDINGS

Market rate and affordable housing developers can directly build transportation alternatives into properties. Developments can reduce their parking burden and promote lower-cost transportation alternatives through incentivizing:

- Vehicle sharing by setting aside spaces for car share services, providing discounted or free membership as part of rent, or providing a shared vehicle as a free amenity to residents.
- Bicycle sharing by providing a complimentary or discounted Divvy membership as part of rent.
- Transit use by directly bundling transit cards into rent, as is frequently done with parking.

STRATEGY THREE:  
COMMUNITY EDUCATION THROUGH DATA

Community skepticism often emerges about the impacts of low-parking buildings. Residents may see a lack of available parking on the street and fear that a new building will only add to the crunch. Good data can help make the case that off-street parking can be lowered below conventional minimums and help neighborhood affordability. Importantly, numbers help empower the quieter voices in a room to speak in support of a project and work a neighborhood toward consensus. CNT’s equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD) tool provides this data.