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**Parking changes coming to OTR amid clashing commercial and resident interests**

If you drive to the Findlay Market to shop, your go-to parking spot might come at a cost in 2025.

Changes are coming in northern Over-The-Rhine this new year, with the implementation of a controversial zoning plan that draws attention to the ongoing battle between business and resident interests in the quickly developing neighborhood.

The North Curb Parking Plan was introduced in 2022, when city council requested that the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) help create it. The plan, which models itself after parking infrastructure in southern OTR, creates a Special Parking Permit Area (SPPA) around the Findlay Market to address the needs of residents, workers and stakeholders.

An SPPA is a zoning area implemented where there is competitive demand for on-street parking between residents, businesses, and visitors. Portions of the SPPA are designated residential parking only, flexible parking that can be accessed by residential permit, or paid-parking-only.

A map of parking areas

Description automatically generated

*The most recent and final SPPA map, courtesy of the DCED.*

The plan went through several changes before being passed on Oct. 23rd, 2024, as council and the DCED strived to find compromise between commercial and residential interests. Some changes made to the final plan include the addition of more residential spots, and removal of the area north of Findlay St. from the SPPA. Residential parking permits were raised from $30 to $60 a year (matching permit prices in southern OTR), with a $25 low-income option for those eligible. Still, not everyone is pleased with the outcome.

Alexis Marsh is a familiar name in the city council. She’s the author of [a popular Change.org petition](https://www.change.org/p/reject-the-proposed-parking-plan-for-findlay-district-call-for-full-community-engagement?utm_medium=custom_url&utm_source=share_petition&recruited_by_id=374750e0-a695-11ea-a264-5df3c5708929) that made many Cincinnatians aware of the parking plan. An OTR resident and member of the OTR Community Council (OTRCC), Alexis has been a vocal critic of the policy since the beginning.

Marsh and the OTRCC have pushed for more resident-only parking in their neighborhood, as they’ve watched their neighbors have trouble finding reliable street spots and pay off parking tickets. “Ideally, people don't have cars, but this is the kind of the city we live in,” says Marsh. “We need to lose the ideology that if you live in an urban center, all you do is stay there.”

Marsh claims that most of the OTR resident’s she’s spoken with work in neighborhoods or suburbs that are inaccessible by bus to make a living wage. “They’re coming home at night and they don’t have anywhere to park,” she says. “So they’re parking on sidewalks, in illegal zones, or at meters and getting tickets.”

But why is such a walkable neighborhood still car-dependent? “In the 1960s and 1970s, the city was dying. And the solution, council thought, was to make the city look more like the suburbs,” explains Jeff Cramerding, council member and chair of the Equitable Growth and Housing Committee. “That strategy was a failure. We tore a lot down and built a lot of parking lots. By trying to create surface parking, we undermined the character of our city.”

Now, Cramerding says city council is embracing the “urban character” and walkability of Cincinnati. “People moving here, especially young people, want a vibrant, walkable city,” he says. “That’s what we need to compete with our peer cities.”

It’s clear that Cincinnati still feels the impact of past de-urbanization attempts, as many residents, even OTR residents, depend on their cars.

Jackie Dean, 65, has lived in OTR her entire life. After 65 years in the neighborhood, she claims to be facing something she never expected to encounter: $900 in parking tickets.

Though she’s retired, Dean uses her car for a variety of purposes: Doctors appointments, grocery shopping, and visiting her brother in the nursing home. As she’s watched OTR revitalize and grow, she’s also watched residential parking dwindle. “They built [a new apartment on Central Parkway](https://www.newrepublicarchitecture.com/work/griffon/), but didn’t consider where those residents would park,” she says. “They built [the Findlay Market Garage], but residents can’t park in there unless they pay $200 a month. People are already paying rent and taking care of their children; who has that kind of money?”

The Findlay Market Garage has been a hot talking point in the debate surrounding North Curb, as entry cost and a lack of advertising have made most of the 515 lots inside of it [sit empty](https://www.instagram.com/p/DBPyGQZxoQE/?img_index=2), even on busy days. OTR residents can pay $160 a month for Monday - Friday parking in the garage (excluding FCC game days), or $200 for 24/7 access, like Dean said.

According to Dan Bower, deputy director at the DCED, county officials have offered to lower the garage’s rates if “they can get a big group to show interest in buying passes, and parking there,” but with the amount of free street parking currently available, this hasn’t happened.

“I think, with all of the demand, more people will start to park in the garage,” says Bower. “But a lot of people just don’t know how to get into it. That’s why part of the plan is to add more wayfinding signage around the market.”

“When it comes to the garage, we all need to do a better job making people aware of these opportunities,” says Cramerding.

Though the final plan was changed to include more resident-only parking, Cramerding says council is “skeptical” of these spaces. “When you’re reserving a spot for residents, you’re taking spots away from visitors, businesses, and tourists, driving up housing values, and creating a less vibrant neighborhood,” he says. “When a spot has no meter, we are losing $5-10k yearly that could go into public services and more development in the neighborhood, or even, another garage.”

Currently, council plans to measure occupancy of the on-street parking areas 6-12 months after the plan is implemented and make changes “as needed to better meet demand,” but just as Cramerding is skeptical about the future, so are the residents.

For residents like Dean, health issues and the challenges that accompany aging make utilizing the neighborhood’s walkability difficult. “[The city] wants us to ride bikes,” she says. “I’m not riding a bike. I’m 65.”

“The popular worldview is that if you're an urban resident, you’re young, you make a lot of money, and if you need a car, you should be paying a great amount to park it,” says Marsh. “And we're trying to say that people live downtown and in OTR for many different reasons, not just to go to the Findlay Market, bars, or exciting restaurants. This is a diverse place. It’s a comfortable space for many people, and it’s hard to get the point across that that matters.”

Cramerding says he wishes all the parties the best, and expects a continued push for more residential parking. “But like I said, we’re going to be skeptical of that,” he says, “People want to live in OTR because it’s our most walkable neighborhood, and restrictions like residential parking make it less walkable. You either embrace that aspect of walkability, or face obstacles.”