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## Seattle Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) Program BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### RPZs in Seattle

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The Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) program is designed to help residents who live in congested areas by discouraging long-term parking of non-residents on residential streets.

Residential Parking Zones were first established in Seattle in 1979 by Council ordinance. The ordinance noted that “experimentation on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis will provide the City experience” to guide future program refinements. In 1994, changes were made to RPZ implementation procedures to streamline the process for communities to obtain a RPZ.

Seattle’s Residential Parking Zone program now includes twenty-seven zones. Over 17,000 vehicles have RPZ decals.

Neighborhoods continue to express interest in forming new RPZs; current examples include Upper Queen Anne and the areas around the five Link light rail stations in southeast Seattle.

**Currently, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is conducting the RRZ Policy Review Project, a thorough review of all elements of the RPZ program.**

### What the law says

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#### United States Supreme Court Ruling on RPZs

In 1977 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a challenge to the RPZ program in Arlington County, Virginia, which charged that distinction between residents and non-residents was unconstitutional. The court’s ruling upheld the city’s “legitimate objectives of reducing air pollution and other adverse consequences of automobile commuting, and of enhancing the quality of life in residential areas, such as by reducing noise and traffic hazards.”

The court’s decision referenced Arlington County’s tests for creating an RPZ, which included the percentage of all parking spaces in use, and the percentage of parked cars registered to non-residents. These tests have been incorporated into RPZ programs across the country, including Seattle.



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**The Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) addresses RPZs at a fairly high level,** establishing the legality of the parking restrictions, permit fees, and parking violation fines, but leaving most of the program management details to the discretion of the SDOT director. Seven of the early zones were created by ordinance and are specified in the SMC.

## **Creating a Zone**

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RPZs are formed through a community-initiated process that asks SDOT to work with a neighborhood on forming an RPZ. Guidelines based on the U.S. Supreme Court's 1977 decision set a framework that calls for 75% of on-street spaces to be in use for at least eight hours a day, with at least 25% of the parked vehicles non-residential on five contiguous blocks. Additionally, a local traffic generator needs to be identified such as hospitals or universities.

### **Community Initiated Process**

The community initiated process generally takes about a year, from the initial request to establishment of a new zone.

- Step 1: The neighborhood association or community council or 25 or more residents in a five-block or larger area submit a request to SDOT to consider an RPZ.
- Step 2: SDOT prepares an initial assessment of the parking situation. If it appears that an RPZ may be appropriate, the process moves to step 3.
- Step 3: SDOT conducts a parking study, which entails surveying the supply of on-street parking spaces available in the study area. To determine utilization, license plates of cars in the study area are recorded by SDOT staff in early morning, late morning, and afternoon. If the study demonstrates a need, the process moves to step 4.
- Step 4: SDOT forms a RPZ design committee that is representative of the community. The members of the RPZ committee should represent various interest groups such as residents, businesses, and institutions. If the design committee reaches consensus and the neighborhood wishes to proceed, the process moves to step 5.
- Step 5: The RPZ design committee or other interested community members must get 60% of the households (residents) in the proposed RPZ to sign a petition requesting RPZ signs to be installed in the neighborhood.
- Step 6: The SDOT director announces the final design of the RPZ and notifies the public. The director's decision can be appealed to the Director of Transportation within 15 days.
- Step 7: Approximately six months after a new RPZ is created, SDOT may modify parking restrictions for non-permit holders. Any changes during the six month review period will be discussed with the community. Each zone has different restrictions.

## **SDOT Initiated Process**

SDOT routinely prepares neighborhood parking studies that look at utilization of on-street spaces. Based on these studies and other professional knowledge and judgment, SDOT may create an RPZ, in cooperation with neighborhoods.

## **Eligibility for permits**

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The Seattle Municipal Code restricts parking in RPZs to residents of the abutting property and/or within the RPZ boundary and service vehicles having business in the street or with residents.

SDOT also provides permits for home health aides, and owners or managers of apartment buildings for the purpose of servicing their buildings. Procedures for documenting eligibility, proof of residence, proof that the vehicle is owned by a resident and allowable exceptions, are defined administratively by SDOT.

## **Parking restrictions for non-permitted vehicles**

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The parking restrictions for vehicles without a permit vary by RPZ and sometimes within subareas in the same RPZ. The types of variation include: different parking time limits, different day-of-the-week configurations, and different time-of-day configurations

## **RPZ Permit Fees and Fines**

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The fee for an RPZ permit is \$35 every two years. A guest permit is \$15 with a vehicle permit, or can be purchased separately – but only by residents of the RPZ – for \$35. RPZ permit fees are established by Council ordinance.

As a condition of approval included in the Master Use Permit, some institutions are required to pay all or part of the cost of the RPZ permits in their zones of influence. Residents in eleven of the city's twenty-seven RPZs have all or part of their permit fees paid by universities, hospitals, or other parking generators.

The fine for overtime or non-permitted parking in an RPZ is \$44.