Put the Park in Parking

Parking can complement the building and street if it does not visually dominate the site. People often meet where they park their cars, so include places to casually talk out of the flow of traffic. Well-designed and landscaped sites will yield more long-term value than the original investment, increasing financial returns for developers 5 - 15% according to a 1994 Urban Land Institute study.

- **Instead of empty lots, build parking groves and parking courts**, with a significant number of shade trees and surrounded by low hedges, stone walls or attractive fencing.

- **Divide the rows with planting strips and tree islands**, averaging a tree every 6 to 10 spaces.

- **Set landscaping guidelines for the interior of lots**: the zoning for Pawling and Hyde Park, for example, requires at least 15% of the inside area for larger lots be landscaped with trees and other plants.

- **Insist on a continuous landscaping treatment along any frontage** with street trees and low plantings and denser evergreens or fencing along residential neighbors.

- **Break up the blacktop and reduce water runoff** by using bricks, pavers, or textured surfaces for crosswalks and stalls, with grass block overflow areas.

*Dia Center for the Arts in Beacon has proposed a distinctively landscaped parking grove with three types of flowering trees that promise abundant shade and an enticing entrance area.*

*Diamond-shaped tree islands 6 feet wide provide a shade tree every 4 to 6 stalls, without losing a single parking space. Planting islands with gaps in the curbs can allow natural drainage of stormwater.*
Surface parking covers 60% of most suburban shopping centers and office sites. Outdated zoning laws often require parking lots with twice as much parking area as needed on a typical day, thus reducing building and landscaping potential on a parcel. Smaller, more flexible parking standards can emphasize architecture over asphalt and increase tax revenues from new infill businesses, as well as reduce stormwater pollution and help heal ugly gaps between buildings. And remember, there is no such thing as free parking. Each surface space costs about $50 per month on average to build and maintain, so smaller lots mean more available money for higher quality landscaping and site improvements.

- **Keep car places small**, breaking up large lots and encouraging shared parking between adjacent uses.
- **Put parking lots behind the building lines**, featuring instead fine architecture and front yard landscaping.
- **Add convenient on-street parking**, when possible, to count toward parking requirements and reduce lot sizes.
- **Encourage flexibility**: several localities, including the Town of Clinton and the Village of Fishkill, allow boards to waive up to half the required spaces for a trial period, rather than build more spaces than needed.
- **Use updated parking requirements** with efficient stalls and aisle sizes (see below) and current use standards.

Sources:
Mark Childs, Parking Spaces, 1999
Anton Nelessen, Visions for the New American Dream, 1993