



Trees and Parking Lots

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Along with our marriage to the automobile has come its unpleasant relative — the parking lot. Approximately 10 percent of the surface in urban areas is dedicated to this storage space for cars, and its impact on the character of a community is significant. But with creative landscaping and the use of trees, there is no reason why parking lots cannot offer multiple benefits instead of visual blight.

Sometime in the 1920s, the automobile worked its way firmly into the fabric of American life. It became the very focal point of urban family life, with one classic study finding that most people said they were more willing to mortgage their homes and deplete their life savings than to give up their car.

Today, the car has evolved from a mere means of enjoyment and personal freedom to an absolute necessity for work and play. More than 250 million cars now prowl our streets and byways, more than double the number present in the latter part of the twentieth century. Millions more are added each year by foreign and domestic factories. Over 90 percent

of all U.S. households have a car, with most owning more than one.

With this magnitude of national obsession, it is not surprising that there are few things more challenging than trying to separate Americans from their cars. This fact of life has confounded mass transit planners, frustrated national park managers, and definitely not escaped the notice of merchants and others who need to attract customers.

Parking lots are here to stay. The mention of closing one, converting it to another use, or even reducing the number of stalls is a clarion call to battle with merchants, faculty, workers or others who use the lot. Still, is it necessary for so much of our community to be a barren sea of asphalt?

In the pages that follow, a case is made for sharing parking lots with trees. When this is done, parking lots become a multiple-attribute to any business, institution or community. Parking lots with trees can attract business, enhance the work place and uplift the quality of life in your community.



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