

Johnny P. Abbvie CF Scholarship

This is the first newsletter I created for Strong Towns Overland Park, a civic advocacy organization I created in my hometown to raise awareness about urban issues.

STRONG TOWNS

OVERLAND PARK

Welcome to the Inaugural Newsletter!
First things first: WOW.

In just under a month, Strong Towns Overland Park went from an idea to a real group of passionate individuals, and that is entirely because of you all. I can't wait to get this off the ground, so let's do that, shall we?

The vision for Strong Towns Overland Park rests on three central ideas:

Teaching Informed Activism - Using our newsletter to discuss topics reinforced by national Strong Towns leadership, and translating those topics into those of local communities.

Connecting Like-Minded Citizens - Providing a forum for those who are all collectively interested in city planning and safety to communicate and share their thoughts on issues of concern.

Making Real Change - As a long-term goal, Strong Towns' ability to cause direct civic change lies directly within the hands of its members.

As our membership has grown over the last month, I've had the opportunity to [sit down with the Blue Valley Post](#) to discuss

Strong Towns Overland Park and its future.

I also got the chance to chat with [Chris Newlin, a candidate for Overland Park City Council's Ward 6](#), about ways to keep young residents in the city and to improve quality-of-life.

On Wednesday, I met with [Gregg Riess, a candidate for Overland Park City Council's Ward 4](#), to discuss the future Strong Towns envisions for the city's trails, sidewalks, and pedestrianism.

All of these have been exciting examples in just the first month of ways the Strong Towns word has been spread, and I'm excited to continue that trend. Anticipate more meetings, public projects and recruitment events to be announced in future newsletters.

Each Strong Towns Newsletter from here on out will grapple with one of four Strong Towns principles, and relate them to the way Overland Park is built. Those four principles are Pedestrians, Parks, Parking, Housing.

Relating these principles to financial resiliency, safety, accident reduction, efficient land use, and quality-of-life should help enlighten Strong Towns OP members to think critically about their city. This, on top of meetings, public projects and recruitment events, will be the base for Strong Towns Overland Park's success.

Today's deep dive topic is: Parking!

Seas of parking spaces are ubiquitous in a suburb like Overland Park, but as the

city has grown, those parking spaces and the land they take up have become a valuable commodity.

A major cause of parking excess is the urban planning strategy of parking minimums. This is the idea that any given building must have a proportion of parking spots to capacity -- an idea that has merit, but not when those ratios come to an extreme.

To learn more about the pitfalls of parking minimums, check out Strong Towns' video on the topic!

Obviously, parking is still important in a city like Overland Park, no doubt about it. But that doesn't mean there aren't places where there is simply too much parking.

Take for example the shopping center below, located at 119th and Metcalf/Blue Valley Parkway.



From the aerial view alone, you can tell that there is *tons* of parking here. But is all of it necessary?

According to [the City of Overland Park's current parking minimums](#), the square

footage of the businesses here would require 1,130 spaces in this shopping center. How many spaces actually exist here? 2324.

That's more than double what the City requires, and the land taken up by extra spaces is enough to fit TWO of [south Overland Park's Chicken N Pickle](#) developments, with still room to spare. Why does this massive gap in requirement and reality exist, when it's blatantly poor land use?

Well, although [the City reduced its parking requirements in 2021](#), developments from before that change are left with still bloated lots. Similarly, big-box developers like Walmart often request exemptions and permission to exceed parking maximums, and for cities hoping to bring those developers in, they often accept those requests.

I don't know about you, but I would be eager to turn hypotheticals about how we *could* be using this extra parking space into real plans for better design. I would think two Chicken N Pickles sound better than 1,194 parking spots.

Parking mandates hurt the flexibility of developers to choose what they would like to do with their land. Business confidence in a financially resilient community can be reinforced by showing ways for small businesses to open without fearing extra expenses from parking lot construction. Not only would less parking space free up area for efficient land use, asphalt parking lots lead to tons of pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions, so less parking is better for the environment.