



Going Up and Going Greener

—Vertical parking structures offer a more eco-friendly solution for developers

When AT&T found the perfect site to build a new facility in Mt. Laurel, NJ, there was one thing standing in their way—wetlands. In order to provide the amount of parking their new facility would need, surface parking lots would have to encroach onto the wetlands. However, the solution was quite simple: go up instead of out. Building a vertical parking structure, which requires 15% less land than surface lots, made the land viable for development.

This is becoming a common situation as easily developed and usable sites are becoming scarcer due to environmental regulations, zoning, inflation, and aggressive development. Many large institutional companies are increasing the density of people in their buildings. Planners used to allow 400 square feet of gross space per person. Now they are allowing 200 square feet per person, doubling building capacities: more people in less space results in even more cars for existing parking areas to accommodate.

“It’s building versus land—finding a balance that suits both requirements,” said Alan Simon of Simon Design Engineering in Wellesley, MA. “More developers are turning to structured

parking facilities to make previously unacceptable sites feasible for use.”

Finding adequate parking solutions isn’t limited to new construction. A closed 4,000 square foot Western Electric phone repair facility in Watertown, MA, sat empty for years because of inadequate parking. The addition of a 1,400 space parking structure made the site viable for re-purposing. The site is now home to Tufts Health Plan.

While structured parking provides a solution to limited land concerns, developers are finding ways of making them friendlier to the environment and more acceptable to people, all the while extending the use of the land they occupy. Some garages now have roof decks, recreation centers, solar power centers and wind farms. “These amenities are becoming a requirement as society is considering land use and its impact on the environment,” said Simon. “There is now a desire for the consolidation of vehicles into multi-modal centers in an effort to reduce man’s carbon footprint. Multi-purposing parking facilities with the integration of technology, and looking at roofscapes as additional area for various applications is essentially added value ‘found’ space.” [For more information, call (781) 237-2226 or visit www.sde-us.com.]