

An urban parking perk: The automated garage

By C. J. Hughes

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For decades, Italy, Germany and Japan have been developing automated garages in which cars are not driven to parking spaces but instead are lifted by computerized machines and stowed in compact berths. Such designs greatly increase the number of vehicles that a garage can hold.

One of the first automated garages in the New York area--designed by [Robotic Parking Systems](#) of Clearwater, Fla., and opened in 2002 in Hoboken, N.J.--took too long to retrieve cars, drivers said, and even dropped a few. Robotic Parking said the problems in Hoboken had been fixed, and it was now in talks to build automated garages at 30 sites in the New York City area, according to Jeffrey Faria, a company spokesman.

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Other developers seem to be thinking along the same lines in New York, as parking a car the old-fashioned way becomes more difficult because traditional surface parking lots are being gobbled up as sites for new buildings, according to developers, brokers and land-use experts.

Some luxury-condo developers are offering in-house automatic garages as a sales incentive for new residents, on a par with concierge service or hotel-pool passes.

"There's no question that with parking, the development becomes that much more valuable; for the buyer, it's an absolute plus," said Arthur Stadig, a vice president in the Boston office of Walker Parking Consultants, whose clients include developers of condos, office buildings and stores.

One pioneer is the seven-story luxury condo rising at 123 Baxter Street, between Hester and Canal Streets in Lower Manhattan. It will have 24 units, ranging in size from 1,200-square-foot one-bedrooms to 4,800-square-foot four-bedrooms, according to Perry Finkelman, chief executive of the American Development Group, the project's developer.

Each apartment, he said, will be guaranteed at least one parking space in the basement garage, which will fit 68 cars. The spots will be leased for \$550 a month, Finkelman said.

The spaces cost about \$40,000 each to build on average, compared with \$30,000 for a space in a typical underground parking lot, although those figures can be considerably higher, depending on how deep the builder has to dig and what is encountered along the way.

Compensating for lost spaces

Any spaces in the garage that are not rented by residents will be available to the public on a daily or monthly basis, said Finkelman, who owned the 100-space parking lot that formerly occupied the site.

Although constructing the condo meant a net loss of about 30 parking spaces, higher rates on the public portion will help to guarantee a revenue stream comparable to what the old lot provided, he said. The old lot charged \$20 a day;



the new one will charge \$30, or \$550 a month, the same rate as for residents.

"And there will be no more screeching tires and dents and things going missing," said Finkelman, referring to an attendant-based system.

The absence of garage workers, though, may take some getting used to, said Ari Milstein, director of planning for [Automotion Parking Systems](#), based in West Hempstead, N.Y., which created the garage's technology. A driver drops off a car in one of two bays, grabs a receipt from a kiosk and pays at the same kiosk later on to retrieve the vehicle.

"When people first started using ATMs, they were uncomfortable with them," Milstein said. "The more they use this, the more they will come to appreciate it over the conventional way."

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—Stanley Perelman,,
managing principal, Jani
Real Estate

In the meantime, he is licensing his technology to Finkelman for another project: the Sochi, a 28-story luxury condo in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, where [an automated garage](#) will offer parking for 130 cars in a back-of-the-building above-ground space that would otherwise have a capacity for half that, Milstein said.

[An automated garage](#) is also a major selling point for One York Street, a 14-story luxury condo between St. John's Lane and West Broadway in Lower Manhattan, which will break ground next summer.

When completed, it will have 40 residences, ranging in size from 1,000-square-foot studios to 3,200-square-foot three-bedrooms. Underneath, an automated garage will be able to fit about 40 cars, one per unit, according to Stanley Perelman, the managing principal of Jani Real Estate, the project's developer.

Complicated excavation work means each space will cost about \$130,000 to build, according to Perelman, who will sell them to tenants for \$175,000 for a standard-size car or \$200,000 for a sport utility vehicle. Though the garage will require maintenance and insurance, those expenses will still be lower than paying attendants' salaries, he said.

Another bonus of the technology, designed by Park Plus, based in Wallington, N.J., is that it allows Perelman to increase the garage's capacity without increasing its size, which is limited by the zoning.

Still, he praises it as a cutting-edge amenity. "Virtually every parking lot in the immediate vicinity has been sold and will be developed on," Perelman said. "Once people see how well it works, you will see more and more developers turning to it."

What flies in New York does not necessarily play in other cities, however; many municipal codes do not allow automated parking, so lengthy hearings are often required.

This is a reason the introduction of the technology in the United States has taken so long, said Lee Lazarus, president of [APT Parking Technologies](#), based in Manhattan.

APT said it was negotiating to build automated garages in five cities nationwide, including one in New York. Lazarus would not disclose details because of confidentiality agreements, he said.

"These garages are clearly becoming a useful real-estate development tool," he said.

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