IS YOUR PS

(PARKING STRUCTURE)

A POS?

By Jason Rupp, Partner at AO

Let's be real—parking structures rarely make the highlight reel of a development. But here's what developers and owners **DO** care about: delivering on time, staying on budget, and avoiding painful surprises. And that's exactly where parking structures can quietly derail your project if they're not designed right from the start.

We've seen it happen many times: a garage that looks fine on paper but ends up overbuilt, underperforming, or riddled with change orders because the right questions weren't asked early enough. If your architect didn't flag these issues, it's not because they don't exist—it's because they weren't thinking like a developer.

So how do you know if your PS is a POS? Let me introduce you to the top offenders – and how to avoid them.

1. UTILITIES IN THE WORST PLACES

You'd be surprised how often utility rooms, step-down transformers, or fire risers get shoved into a garage as an afterthought—eating up premium real estate that could've been parking stalls. These aren't elements you can simply "fit in later." They require smart, strategic planning from day one.

Every lost stall is lost revenue. If a late-stage addition to the layout forces you to give up income-generating spaces, it's not just unfortunate— it's preventable. At AO, we work closely with S/MEP consultants early in the design process to ensure utilities are efficiently integrated without compromising stall count or layout. Because in a parking structure, every square foot counts.

2. LIGHTING, SAFETY & SECURITY: NON-NEGOTIABLES

Parking structures can be vulnerable environments. Poor lighting, unclear wayfinding, and hidden corners not only compromise user experience but also raise safety and liability concerns. If you find yourself retrofitting lights, call boxes, or cameras after construction begins, something was missed upstream.

At AO, we apply CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles from the outset—strategic lighting, clear sightlines, call stations, and camera coverage are embedded into the architecture, not added as a reaction. Building safety into the design doesn't just protect users—it protects your bottom line.

3. ACCESSIBILITY & CODE COMPLIANCE: MORE THAN A STRIPE OF PAINT

ADA compliance isn't a checklist you tackle at the end—it's a critical design layer that impacts every level of your structure. From vertical clearance and ramp slopes to turning radii, then truncated domes and elevator placement, accessibility affects how your garage functions and whether it passes inspection.

Too many design teams treat it as a late-stage consideration, leading to costly redesigns, schedule delays, or worse—litigation. At AO, accessibility is embedded from the beginning. We resolve these requirements during early design phases, ensuring your project is fully usable, fully compliant, and free from surprises.

4. FEWER STALLS THAN PROMISED

You gave your architect a footprint and expected them to maximize it. Instead, you got fewer stalls than you budgeted for—and now the numbers don't pencil. What went wrong? Likely inefficient layout, poor ramping strategy, or overly conservative aisle dimensions.

At AO, we start with the end goal in mind—target stall count, user flow, and buildability—then work from the top down to maximize every square foot. Not all layouts are created equal. At AO, we consistently deliver up to 10% more stalls—sometimes as much as 30%— on the same footprint others are working with. That's not just a design win. It's real value.

And we don't stop at the garage itself. We also design intuitive, welcoming entry experiences that support smooth circulation and enhance the overall project value.

If you're planning a garage, let's talk early. The sooner we're involved, the more value we can unlock for your project.

So again—ask yourself: Is your PS a POS?

If there's even a chance the answer is yes—call us before it's too late.

714.221.4922
(Jason's direct number)
jasonr@aoarchitects.com