

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Parking Study: to develop and implement a comprehensive, effective and workable parking management plan for Downtown Springfield. The parking management plan will maximize the parking supply and strategically support the development of a vibrant, growing and attractive destination for shopping, working, living, recreating and entertainment.

A: ISSUES THAT LED TO PARKING STUDY

The City and downtown stakeholders are committed to a more vibrant and friendly downtown for Springfield. The City recognizes the importance of serving existing downtown businesses and attracting new and denser mixed uses. Success in this area will result in increasing demands for parking in the downtown districts, which will lead to conflicts for access between customers and employees. If the City is to be successful in attracting more diverse business users (that include retail, office and residential) a strategic and innovative parking management strategy is essential. Currently, the downtown has many different users each with their own parking demands. Several challenges are in place that will need to be understood and solutions developed to address them. According to downtown stakeholders participating in the study, key challenges include:

- ✓ *The downtown parking system is not yet formatted in a way that best serves the area.*

The issue of how parking is provided in Springfield to meet economic goals and objectives is critical to the success of a parking management plan. Issues of who the priority “customer “ is and how to accommodate other, secondary priorities will be a key to establishing a balanced and workable plan for the business district.

- ✓ *The system is not easy to use, particularly for newcomers to the district.*

The current parking format is difficult to use and understand. This can have an adverse impact on district business viability. Compounding this is the sense that directional and information systems for patrons are inadequate. The need for aggressive and sustained marketing and communications will be as important as specific parking management strategies.

- ✓ *While starting with a good foundation, Springfield needs to attract a more diverse mix of “business” that includes retail, office and residential.*

The parking plan needs to be structured to assure that (a) existing businesses benefit and (b) new businesses are attracted to Springfield because access systems are effective and business supportive. The parking plan should be complimentary of the visioning work now underway by the City.

B. PARKING STUDY REVIEW PROCESS

To find a solution to the downtown parking issues, the City employed Rick Williams Consulting to facilitate a study of downtown parking and provide recommendations to address the various needs and competing uses.

To assist with this study, a stakeholder committee was formed in July 2009. The Committee met eight times from July 2009 to April 2010 to discuss parking principles, issues, and recommendations. A comprehensive parking data inventory and capacity demand analysis was conducted in September 2009 and served as a foundation piece for understanding downtown parking dynamics and strategy development.

Rick Williams Consulting, working with the Stakeholder Committee, has developed a parking management study and plan complete with recommendations to the City. The City is in the process of discussing the recommendations both internally and with the community to determine how best to implement the recommendations and address existing issues.

C. GENERAL STUDY FINDINGS

- The current parking system is not easy to use.
- The current parking system is not yet formatted in a way that best serves the area.
- The unique uses in the downtown can both complement its vision and compete with its vision.
- The parking plan needs to be structured to assure that (a) existing businesses benefit and (b) new businesses are attracted to Springfield.
- Conflicts currently exist between employees and customers for on-street parking.
- Better integration between the parking supply and other modes of access (i.e., transit/bike/walk) is needed.
- Springfield needs to work on its front door “curb appeal” and perceptions of downtown.

Downtown District Findings:

- There are 1,819 parking stalls (on and off-street) in the Downtown District, of which 647 are on-street. Of the remaining off-street parking (1,172 stalls), 889 stalls are in private ownership (on 47 sites) and 283 are in public ownership (on 12 sites).
- These on-street stalls are regulated by 7 different parking types, ranging from 10 minutes to no limit.
- A high percentage of on-street stalls in the downtown (40.5% or 264 stalls) allow unlimited parking. This is a very high percentage for a downtown desiring a high activity, street level retail environment.

Downtown Usage by Stall Type:

- Peak on-street occupancy reaches 49.8% between noon and 1:00 p.m. 317 on-street stalls are occupied leaving 330 empty stalls available within the downtown.
- The average time stay for all on-street parkers is 3 hours and 29 minutes.
- Parking is readily available on-street throughout the day, with some pockets of high occupancy on specific block faces (though those block faces are generally adjacent to blocks with available parking).

- 1,031 unique license plate numbers were recorded parking in the on-street system between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Over the course of an average day, this would translate to approximately 115 vehicles arriving each hour.
- The downtown on-street parking system has an average turnover rate of 2.87 turns per stall extrapolated to a 10 hour period. A rate of less than 5.00 indicates that the Springfield system is operating sluggishly and is not turning over in a manner that would be considered supportive of vital street level activity.

Downtown Subzone : “Node of Highest Occupancy”

The study also identified a “node of highest occupancy” as a means to identify the area of downtown with the greatest parking activity.

- The “node of highest occupancy” has 296 on-street stalls or about 48% of the total on-street supply.
- 69.8% of these 296 on-street stalls are occupied at the peak hour.
- The turnover time of the on-street supply in the node of highest occupancy is 3.0, which is below the desired rate of 5.0.
- Off-street parking in this node reaches 62.8% in the peak hour.
- As with the larger study zone, the node of highest occupancy maintains a substantial supply of unused and available parking.

D. GUIDING THEMES DEVELOPED BY STAKEHOLDERS

1. Access

- Correlate parking requirements more directly to mixed-use development vision for downtown.
- Strategically locate and actively manage parking under public control and/or ownership to accommodate customer and employee access to the area.
- Parking should be just one of a diverse mix of access options available to users of the downtown.

2. Priority Customer

- Make the downtown conveniently accessible for the priority user of the public parking system – the patron of downtown.
- Reserve the most convenient parking spaces to support customer, client, and vendor and visitor access to downtown.

3. Priority Parking (On-Street)

- Recognize that on-street parking is a finite resource and should be managed to assure maximum access for the priority customer.

4. Employee Parking & Off-Street City Owned Supply

- Provide sufficient and affordable parking to meet downtown employee demand, in conjunction with an access system that provides balanced and reasonable travel mode options.
- If parking in City owned supply exceeds the 85 percent full standard, employee parking should be transitioned and/or phased out to assure priority customer parking is accommodated.

5. Understandability & Quality

- Make downtown parking user-friendly – easy to access, easy to understand.
- Provide a "parking product" in the downtown that is of the highest quality to create a safe and positive customer experience with parking and the downtown.
- The City's public information system should provide a clear and consistent message about auto parking and access to and within downtown in order to optimize utility and convenience for all users.
- Provide safe, secure and well-lit parking to allow a sense of security at all times on street and off-street.

6. Multi-Modal Access

- Transition more downtown employees into alternative modes (i.e., transit, bike, walk, rideshare) through business-based programs and incentives.
- Calibrate parking standards to support the City's goals for transit, biking, walking and ridesharing.

7. Coordination

- Centralize management of the public parking supply and assure a representative body of affected private and public constituents from within the downtown informs decision-making.
- Provide clear and strategic direction to new development in downtown to assure that new growth improves the overall system of access.
- Implement measurements and reporting that assures Guiding Principles are supported and achieved.

- Manage the public parking supply using the “85% Rule” to inform and guide decision-making.
- Encourage and create incentives for shared parking in areas where parking is underutilized.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE DOWNTOWN’S PARKING ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMIC SUCCESS

- Create the position of “Parking Manager/Coordinator.
- Create a permanent Parking Advisory Committee.
- Establish three “Parking Management Zones” based on usage and desired economic development.
- Establish a Downtown Parking and Transportation Fund as a mechanism to direct funds derived from parking into a dedicated fund.
- Add parking to the on-street system in the downtown in areas currently designated as no parking areas. This parking will be provided as either 2-hour parking or “2-hour or by permit” (based on location and proximity to downtown core). This would translate to as many as 71 total new stalls.
- Reduce and/or eliminate all 30 minute and No-limit parking stalls in Zone A and convert all stalls to 2-hour parking. Requests for any other type of stalls in the future would be coordinated through an exception process.
- Develop an on-street employee parking permit program (i.e., paid permits) that would allow limited use of 2 hour stalls for on-street all day parking in Zone B.
- Reduce and/or eliminate all 10 minute, 15 minute, 30 minute, 1-hour and No-limit parking stalls in Zone B and convert all stalls to 2-hour parking “or by permit.” Requests for any other type of stalls in this Zone would be coordinated through an exception process.
- Re-stripe all on-street parking in Zones A & B to better identify parking availability and location.
- Initiate parking enforcement activities in Zone A to assure existing time zones are honored and system utilization/turnover is operating as intended.
- Re-evaluate and reformat stalls in publicly owned off-street lots to balance employee use and short-term access. Explore employee parking permit pricing based on 85% standard.
- Initiate a new and comprehensive outreach program to all businesses within the study zone that communicates the parameters of the new Parking Management Plan.

- Develop a Residential Parking Permit Zone (RPPZ) policy and program for adoption by the City Council for future implementation in residential areas affected by spillover from commercial parking (i.e., Zone C).
- Negotiate shared use and/or lease agreements with owners of strategically placed existing private surface lots in Zones A & B to provide for an interim supply of parking where needed. Begin focus on Blocks 15, 18, 26, 37, 32 & 41 as identified in the 2009 – 2010 Parking Study.
- Develop and install a signage package of uniform design, logo and color at public and private (shared use) off-street parking facilities.
- Strategically place new and coordinated way finding signage in the right-of- way at locations chosen carefully to direct visitors to off-street locations.
- Partner with the business community to develop/refine a marketing and communication system for access in Springfield. The marketing/communication system could include (but not be limited to): branding; maps and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) alternatives.
- Evaluate and develop a minimum parking ratios policy for new development in the downtown, to assure that access impacts of new development are (a) meaningfully addressed, (b) correlated to actual parking demand and (c) provide potential for generating a revenue source for future parking through a parking fee-in-lieu option.
- Evaluate and develop restrictions on new surface parking lot development within Zones A & B.
- Evaluate and develop a fee-in-lieu option for new parking development in the downtown.
- Develop a recommended package of incentives for the private development of publicly available parking.
- Lease/acquire strategically located land parcel(s) for use as future public off-street parking in the downtown.
- Sponsor employer-based initiatives to encourage employee use of alternate travel modes.
- Establish commuter mode split targets for employee access in the downtown.
- Monitor downtown parking utilization continuously and periodically. Conduct parking inventory analyses.
- Evaluate the impact of near and mid-term strategies based on an updated utilization and demand study. If and when warranted, develop a pricing policy strategy and implement paid on street parking in downtown districts based on the 85% Rule.
- Complete development and open new public supply in the downtown.

F. CONCLUSION

Sufficient supplies of parking exist in the downtown area to accommodate today's use and near term growth of the downtown. A significant quantity of the parking supply is in private ownership. To provide for the downtown's further development as a viable commercial district, on-street parking must be managed to insure the priority customer's demand for parking is met. Additionally, given the multi uses envisioned for the downtown core, parking must be managed to insure the needs of all users can be accommodated.

Parking is a resource to all users of the system. All users must share the cost of managing, maintaining and growing the parking resource. This will be accomplished through implementation of the strategies outlined and recommended in the parking plan. Key to the implementation strategy is recognition of (a) the role the City will need to play to assure that the urban form envisioned for the downtown is attained, (b) the need to maximize use of existing surpluses of parking to create constraints necessary to establish a market for pricing parking, (c) the need to control/limit surface lot development, (d) actively managing the on-street system to support customer/patron access to support street level businesses and (e) transitioning employees to off-street facilities and alternative modes of transportation.