Managing Amherst’s Downtown Parking

2018 Citizen Planning and Training Collaborative
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Parking Introduction

• Getting parking right is difficult
• Parking is a critical downtown asset—too much or too little can have negative impacts
• Management is key—need turnover and availability
• Shared parking is important, and may happen informally
• Parking in context—walking, cycling, buses, downtown district
About Amherst

• 2017 Est. Population: 39,000
• Daytime Population: 50,000
• 28 sq. miles
• Town Meeting with Select Board
• Business Improvement District
• 115 business with 45 restaurants
• UMass, Amherst & Hampshire Colleges
• Transportation fund: $1M
  • 20,000+ tickets/year
  • 750+ on-street permits
• 2015 Transportation Plan: $50K and 1 Yr
• 2014-15 Community Forums
• 2016 Parking Inventory: $40K
• 2016-18 Downtown Parking Working Group
History of Downtown Parking

• 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Parking Study
  • Areas of high demand, but adequate supply of public parking
  • Data did not support planning for a new garage

• 2015 Transportation Plan
  • Pedestrian, Transit, Roads, Parking
  • Current supply of downtown parking adequate but needs better management
  • Recommended improvement—signs, pricing, shared parking

• 2014-15 Community Forums
  • Many businesses and visitors think parking is a problem
  • Parking demand from college students
  • Businesses hear that customers cannot find parking
  • An assumption that downtown needs another garage
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Strongly Support</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
<th>Strongly Oppose</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begin planning process for new parking facility now</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
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<td>Improve signs for public lots</td>
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<td>Make payment simpler and more predictable</td>
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<td>18.18%</td>
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<td>Review smart technologies/app’s</td>
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<td>27.27%</td>
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<td>Consider different fees for metered parking</td>
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<td>Update parking data</td>
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<td>Evaluate regulations for streets near downtown</td>
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<td>Explore ways to expand Town Center Permit system</td>
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<td>Promote use of Town Center Permit parking after 5:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>22.73%</td>
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<td>Re-establish Parking Commission or similar</td>
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<td>Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements</td>
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<td>Develop pilot program for overnight winter parking</td>
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<td>Review snow removal policy for downtown parking</td>
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Public metered spaces: 650
On-street permit: 400
Unregulated on-street: 280
Private: 2,000
TOTAL SPACES: 3,400
Peak demand (use) is lunch time (1 PM) and evenings (7 PM)
Short term actions: maximize current system
Long term strategies: shared/leased parking agreements, increase supply of public parking (including a possible parking garage)
Issues Identified

• Perception is reality when it comes to parking
• High demand for visible spots
• Low cost—students use downtown as a parking lot; employees meter feed
• Time limits not enforced
• Current system is confusing
• Zoning—Municipal Parking District = no parking requirements
Downtown Parking Working Group (DPWG)

- Broad community representation with 7 members—
  - commercial property owner,
  - downtown resident, downtown business owner/manager,
  - Planning Board representative,
  - Select Board representative,
  - at-large members,
  - staff support from Planning, Public Works, Treasurer/Collector

- Term limited (2 yrs.) committee
- Identify short, medium and long range strategies
- Refine and present prioritized parking recommendations to the Select Board for action
- Identify baseline information required prior to further consideration of a parking facility and other changes
DPWG Goals and Recommendations—Phase 1

- Demand-based parking
- Turnover of prime spots
- Consistent regulations
- Increase visibility of parking
- Community input—June 2017 forum and 3+ meeting with Select Board (televised)
Demand-based Parking

• Goal is to have 10-15% vacancy of prime spots at any given time
• Price of parking is proportionate to demand
• Encourage use of all parking (i.e. peripheral spaces cost less for longer term parking)
Recommendations: For Clarity, Consistency and to Encourage Turnover – Phase I

• Identify parking core
• Increase rates in core: 50 cents to $1/hr.
• Consistent time limits: 2 hr. and 4 hr.
• Consistent hours of enforcement: 8 am- 8 pm
• Use enforcement to discourage meter feeding
• Increase parking ticket fines: $10 to $15
• New signs, webpages, outreach
• Allow overnight winter parking with weather emergency
• Mobile Payment option-Parking App
Recent Changes Implemented

- New maps and webpage
- More parking available in the core
- Parking machines are easy to use
- Mobile App is used by many
- Few complaints
- Anecdotally, more town center permits (on street parking) are used
Coming Up

• Downtown Employee Survey
• Push back from Chamber of Commerce
• Funding Request for Parking Consultant
• Parking Garage perception and initial feasibility
• Town staff parking
• Senior parking
• Changes to the Employee Parking Permit System
• Evaluation of changes—data collection
Lessons Learned

• Learning curve by committee, staff and community
  • Public outreach, signs and roll out of changes is critical
• Resistance to change and any increase in price
  • Convincing the public that goal is not just revenue generation
• Responsibilities for parking management is spread over many Town departments and positions—Police, Treasurer, Public Works, Select Board
• Private parking is a key stakeholder
• A parking garage may not be the answer
• This all takes a lot of time, and then more time
Contact Information

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