

**City of Springfield, OR
Downtown Parking Study
Parking Advisory Committee Summary Document
(as of September 24, 2008)**

This document is a summary of stakeholder work sessions now underway in the *Downtown Springfield Parking Study*. The purpose of this document is to capture stakeholder discussion about the parking plan, community priorities about downtown development and parking and to serve as a foundation document for developing policies, programs and strategies for parking management. At this time, the document is incomplete in that it reflects only Committee discussions to date. As subsequent work sessions are held and finalized, additional information will be incorporated herein.

A. OUTCOMES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

To develop a parking and access plan for the downtown, it is first necessary to understand the dynamics of land use, access and growth that are unique to Springfield. Community perceptions and realities regarding constraints that limit existing businesses from expanding and those that limit downtown's ability to attract new business and residential growth to the area need to be fully considered. Similarly, opportunities and successful programs/strategies that currently contribute to area's health need to be understood in order to ensure they are supported and enhanced by any new parking and access strategies developed.

To this end, work sessions with the Parking Advisory Committee (PAC) are being held to establish a consensus view of these challenges and opportunities.

1. Desired Outcomes

Committee members were asked to take a moment and state what they would like to see as an outcome of this process. For example, if a new parking management program were developed, what beneficial outcomes would be derived? A bulleted list of those desired outcomes are provided below.

As the study moves forward, the Consultant Team will endeavor to develop a plan and strategy that can best meet these outcomes.

- Create a realistic roadmap for improvement and change.
- Convenient parking that is easy to find, use and understand.
- Make parking more predictable.
- A parking plan that is well thought out and can be communicated effectively to multiple stakeholders.
- A plan that provides the City with credible information about the realities of parking in Springfield that separates the myths from reality, which helps the community understand changes that will result from the plan.
- A parking system that serves and attracts customers.
- Parking should contribute to a positive image of the downtown.
- Parking that is well located to support the downtown vision and managed to be "always available."
- A parking system that is safe and secure.

- A parking system that has well designed facilities. Garages should be required to have ground level active use.
- Parking provided by the public should be able to cover its costs for operation, maintenance and security.
- Rates and fees (if necessary) that are easy to understand, affordable, cost effective and supportive of businesses.
- Revenues or fees from parking in the downtown should go back to the downtown (e.g., parking enterprise fund).
- The parking management plan should provide strategies that are “timely,” assuring implementation that matches need, convenience and funding (a phased plan).
- Facilitate good decision making and cost effectiveness.
- Parking information that is well communicated (e.g., integrated roadway directional signage).
- The plan should produce the best mix of parking to strategically serve all types of users (i.e., employees, visitors and residents).
- Minimize conflicts for parking space between different users.
- Assure that the on-street parking supply has the correct format of time stay designations for priority users.
- The plan should result in an on-street turnover rate that is good for downtown and adjacent uses.
- The parking system supports and attracts more retail to the downtown.
- A system that is coordinated and timed to new development.

It was clear from the listing of desired outcomes that Committee members feel the current system of parking management may, at this time, lack the integration and consistency necessary to achieve the larger vision of a growing, vibrant and “friendly” business district. Similarly, the theme of the need to better “understand” parking runs through many of the stated outcomes as does the need to communicate a “system” of parking that results in a parking strategy that supports more retail and visitor activity in the downtown. The strategy itself will need to be timed to new development growth. In short, to get to the desired outcome of a usable and friendly parking system, requires more clarity and coherency in how parking is, and will be, managed.

2. Opportunities – Consensus Themes

PAC members discussed programs, strategies or elements that are currently in place and “working for Springfield” by contributing to its success and supporting its unique business and economic growth. Opportunities expressed ranged from Springfield’s unique business environment to its strong sense of community and small town feel. As one stakeholder explained, “Springfield has the atmosphere of a *real* downtown; we need to build on that.” The parking management program being developed should strive to leverage these positive opportunities.

Three opportunity themes were clearly distinguished. They are briefly detailed here, with clarifying bullet points taken from the Committee discussion following each theme:¹

¹ The themes are not listed in any rank order. Each theme has an important impact on Springfield’s ability to achieve its strategic vision and should be considered equally in the context of multiple challenges.

- ✓ While parking is an issue, Springfield has a solid foundation to build upon. PAC members felt that there are positive aspects of the current parking system and the downtown area that will strengthen and be compatible with a more refined parking management program.

- The downtown is pleasant and walkable.
- Small town feel – a real downtown; an authentic downtown.
- The river and downtown’s historic legacy.
- Unique architecture (40 historic buildings).
- Unique retail that is not “big box.”
- A small town with potential.
- Lane Transit (LTD) is right in the downtown.
- A good base of jobs, where businesses can co-locate next to government services.

- ✓ A sense that the near term parking supply may be adequate, just inefficiently managed.

Though all Committee members agreed that parking (and new parking supply) is a key issue for the future, in the near term simple “fixes” can be made to reap immediate benefits to the downtown.

- Directional signage could quickly guide people where we want them to go.
- Enforcement could create immediate changes within the parking supply.
- There are lots of opportunities to “add back” parking in areas that appear to unnecessarily limit parking (e.g., many on-street locations).

- ✓ A positive sense about downtown Springfield’s potential. The PAC noted that the work being undertaken by Crandall Arambula, the parking study and other “small steps in the right direction” create a sense that success, growth and vitality are possible for the downtown. These efforts can establish a foundation for growth, investment and revitalization. As one committee member noted, for many in the downtown “there is a passion for the downtown and a true sense of community” that is based on a core belief in Springfield’s potential.

- A unique mix of “business” that can attract customer trips (i.e., museum, the Wildish, two high schools, antique stores, a Farmers Market and the Library – to name a few).
- A base of commercial and government jobs.
- Downtown has a wonderful human scale.
- With a few improvements, downtown could be very walkable.
- Downtown is quirky, friendly and historic.
- Downtown has unique qualities that include the river, murals, history and architecture.

Overall, programs and strategies that continue to support and enhance the opportunity themes developed by the Committee can serve as a framework through which the consensus challenges are best addressed.

3. Challenges to Access - Consensus Themes

Committee members discussed their insights into the major challenges (parking and development) facing downtown Springfield today. They were asked to consider these challenges as they influence Springfield’s ability to remain vital and to attract and retain business.

Challenges ranged from general perceptions of parking to actual physical infrastructure that limits access and creates negative perceptions. For purposes of this report, the stated challenges have been condensed into four “consensus themes.” These themes are presented below, with clarifying bullet points taken from the SAC discussion following each theme.

- ✓ Springfield needs to work on its front door “curb appeal” and perceptions of downtown. There is a sense that the downtown area is a hidden gem, limited because of issues related to image and access barriers exacerbated by high through traffic volumes. Though not specifically a parking problem, the issue of helping visitors find the downtown easily and conveniently will be essential to support the attractiveness of new business (and downtown residential) growth.
 - Through traffic and high speeds are very negative.
 - Deteriorating infrastructure (buildings, roadways).
 - Downtown is too noisy from truck traffic and vehicle speeds.
 - The 300 and 400 blocks have real safety and security problems (high arrests).
 - North A has safety problems as well.
 - There is a perception that there is a lack of business diversity.
 - There is an overall negative perception of public safety in downtown.
 - Poor street lighting.

- ✓ The 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.
 - Employees/owners parking in front of their businesses all day on street.
 - High mix of all day parking on-street.
 - Conflicts in the parking supply between customer and employee demand.
 - The format of off-street facilities needs work to assure that employees and customers are parked where we want them and where it best serves downtown.
 - There is “unused parking” throughout the downtown. This is not efficient.

- ✓ The system is not easy to use, particularly for newcomers to the district. Several Committee members noted 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 important.
 - Access is not intuitive to “outsiders”
 - Poor informational signage.
 - Parking in the district is hard to understand (i.e., signage, directional systems, location of supply, etc.).

- ✓ 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.
 - Need better eating establishments and bars/pubs.

- Need evening activities/businesses that keep and attract people downtown after regular business hours.
- Need “fixed budget” stores and gerontology uses.
- Improve the mix of all businesses.
- Need for housing downtown.
- Need bicycle and walking options and infrastructure as well as good parking.
- Downtown needs a marketing strategy and implementation of that strategy.

4. This document will continue to evolve based on input derived from upcoming PAC meetings.....

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