

# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Parking is a valuable resource that can be used to promote economic development, especially in denser, downtown urban environments. In Ann Arbor, the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) manages a diverse parking inventory, including on- and off-street parking spaces, with the goal of balancing parking demand with maximum benefit to the community.

## **Project History and Objective**

The Ann Arbor Downtown Parking Study was initiated as the first step in the City's pursuit of a comprehensive parking strategy for Downtown. Phase 1 focused on analysis of the existing parking supply and demand, and parking perceptions from the user end. This report documents the efforts completed for Phase I of the Ann Arbor Downtown Parking Study, including the following tasks:

1. Background research to establish Downtown's economic, land use, and regulatory context, including documentation of employee travel characteristics, interviews with key local stakeholders, a summary of relevant zoning regulations, and illustration of the area's land uses.
2. Analysis of DDA's parking inventory, including available supply and quantified utilization patterns during peak periods, input received via written survey and interviews with parkers, and projections of future demand based on proposed development.
3. Summary of complementary parking inventories, specifically those owned by private companies, residents, and the University of Michigan..
4. Provision of meaningful opportunities for public involvement, including the survey and parker interviews described in #2, as well as a public workshop to discuss public perceptions and concerns on parking conditions, plus meetings with the project's advisory committee.

## **DDA's Principles for Parking**

The DDA has invested significant resources, including time, money, and energy, in shaping the public parking system. The following parking management principles have been developed and refined over the past 15 years and serve to guide the DDA's parking investments. They provide a philosophical context for considering the findings of the following report.

- There is a cost and a value associated with every parking space.

- Parking is part of a transportation system, and should be understood in that context.
- Parking is not a silver bullet - no one ever came downtown to park. But the right balance of parking availability, location, and price is essential to downtown's vitality and growth.
- Automobiles are often tagged as the reason for problems in the downtown, but the negative impact of automobiles is usually less a cause than a symptom of faulty planning. Cars make it possible for many people to use and enjoy the downtown.
- It's the people we want downtown, not necessarily their cars. A "menu" should be created and constantly improved upon so people can make transportation and parking choices for themselves about the best way to come to and move through downtown, using such considerations as convenience, price, location, and transportation purpose.
- You can't force people to ride a bus based on economics or restricting availability of parking, because there are too many competing commercial buildings located outside downtown offering plentiful surface parking lots with free parking.
- One of downtown's strengths and appeal is its compact, walkable form, with short blocks, a clearly defined street grid, and a density of services, businesses, and uses in its core. Well-managed parking enables people to take advantage of these assets.
- The public parking system operations can and should be financially self-sustaining, with no need for tax subsidy. The users of the system should pay for the system, including operation, maintenance, repair, and eventual additions to the system.
- Public parking policies should be based on quantified data and analysis.
- Parking is very different in an urban environment than in the suburbs, and it is important to understand the differences between these two settings.
- Parking rates should be set to encourage different behaviors. For instance, the availability of on-street parking meters conveys a great deal about the perceived convenience of shopping or doing business downtown, thus regular turn-over at the meters and long-term parking off-street must be encouraged. Rate configuration can affect parking choices by making it less expensive to park in the surface lots than at a street-meter, and least expensive to park in the structures.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

The following is a summary of the key findings described in this report, categorized as Background, DDA Inventory, Other Inventories, and Public Input.

### **Background**

- Rates of Single-Occupancy Vehicles commuting to Downtown Ann Arbor are modest compared to regional and statewide travel characteristic, and are trending downwards.

- Downtown employees appear to embrace alternatives to personal automobile commuting, especially active forms of commuting (i.e., walking and bicycling), compared to regional and state norms.
- Alternative mode promotion and commuter benefit programs are in place, but could use more promotion, especially in the “lead by example” form from the City and County.

## **DDA Inventory**

- Existing conditions in Downtown present two distinct parking constraints: Evening on-street parking and midday off-street parking in monthly parking facilities.
- Overall parking supply is sufficient to meet existing demand. Average daytime peaks of 83 percent are characteristic of a parking supply that is being optimally used.
- Off-street utilization is higher than on-street during weekdays. Policies aimed at preserving on-street spaces, including off-street discounts, monthly permits, and time limits at meters, appear to be effective. On-street availability during weekday midday hours is over 30 percent across the study area, and within each analysis sub-area.
- Concentrations of on-street parking shortages may create the perception of weekday parking shortages. Concentrations of highly occupied on-street spaces during weekday counts include:
  - o Washington Street, west of Fifth Avenue;
  - o The block of Washington Street, South Ashley Street, William Street, and Main Street; and
  - o Campus-area streets, including blocks surrounding the Quad and within the South Campus sub-area.
- The role of cost in parking and travel decisions is minimized. This is a result of a number of factors:
  - o Off-street parking subsidies for commuters;
  - o Free on-street parking after 6:00 PM;
  - o Minimal rate differentials between parking options;
  - o Location and facility-type preferences.
- Surveys indicate that location is the biggest driver of parking demand across the DDA inventory. While the Existing Conditions analysis found that parking is generally available at most times, location preferences are creating perceptions of parking shortages for many parkers.
- 1-Hour and 30-Minute meters are under-utilized. In addition to a generally low level of occupancy at these meters, many of them appear to be located ineffectively. 1-Hour meters are sometimes placed a block or two from retail/ restaurant uses, while spaces directly in front of these businesses offer two hours of parking (i.e., Liberty

Street, between Main and First Streets). Occupancies along South University Avenue, where all 38 spaces are restricted to 1-hour parking, are also especially low. Some 30-minute meters are placed where there is no apparent short-term parking demand (i.e., Washington Street, between Division Street and the Liberty Square garage).

- Wait list data indicate a concentration of commuter demand at facilities in the western areas of Downtown. Wait lists at Ann & Ashley and 4th & William are significantly longer than at other facilities. These garages also have two of the three highest daytime occupancy averages among facilities offering permits. Car-pool, van-pool, go!pass, and other employer-supported programs may be especially effective in reducing permit pressure at these facilities.
- Surveys and interviews indicated a number of positive Downtown parking conditions including:
  - High rates of park-once behavior (87%);
  - A diversity of trip generators (24% of daytime parkers were not there for work);
  - Long-term visitation relationships and high visitation rates among Downtown parking customers; and
  - The large majority of parkers find a spot within two blocks of their destination and do not feel they are charged too much.
- Surveys and interviews also highlighted some areas of concern including:
  - Perception of security risks at parking structures;
  - Employees using on-street parking spaces which should be available for customers;
  - Some available off-street spaces appear to be, or feel, hard to find;
  - High rates of parking subsidy among daytime parkers;
  - Ineffective enforcement of time limits; and
  - Very short time limits may be hindering Downtown's "Park Once" objective.
- Among transportation alternatives, travel preferences indicate that transit appears to offer the greatest promise for shifting more employees away from personal auto commuting. Current transit barriers indicate that some form of express, or commuter, bus service offers a unique opportunity to capture a latent transit market among Downtown employees.
- Annual added demand of between 50-100 new monthly parking permits is projected for DDA parking facilities.

- Strategies for addressing an anticipated demand for more than 50, and as many as 100, new monthly-permits each year over the next five to ten years should be a top planning priority.
- Strategies for addressing imbalanced utilization between available evening parking supplies should be a high planning priority.

## **Other Inventories**

- University of Michigan facilities likely capture most of the parking demand from full-time faculty and staff. Their permit system offers a number of significant advantages over use of DDA facilities including price, location, and the convenience of yearly payment.
- Most accessory parking is significantly under-used. On-site commercial and employee lots rarely peak above 85 percent utilization and average just over 60 percent. This amounts to a loss of space for higher, better, and more cohesive land uses for Downtown, and countless unnecessary curb-cuts that are disruptive to pedestrian traffic.
- The backyard parking market arises largely from unmet monthly permit demand.

## **Public Input**

- The Ann Arbor community is highly attuned to parking issues, with its members frequently possessing strong, well-informed, and often opposing opinions on various parking and related issues. A number of relationships between user groups and perspectives on parking issues have emerged over the course of this project phase.
- In general, those most opposed to expanded parking supplies are residents. Those most in favor of more parking, and especially more parking permits, are commuters. Those who feel strongest in favor of maintaining parking lots are commuters. Residents, on the other hand, are decidedly mixed in their opinions about converting lots to mixed-use development. Those most averse to using garage spaces are commuters and women in general. The biggest concern among merchants appears to be overly aggressive meter enforcement (time-limit enforcement excepted).
- Opposition to converting lots to stand-alone garages, in contrast, is general and widespread.
- Commuter sentiment, as evinced through parker survey responses, is clear on a number of issues. In general they feel they pay too much for parking, if they pay for it themselves, and that there is not enough parking.
- In addition, many feel that if parking gets much more complicated, working Downtown will not be worth the trouble.

The Real Estate community is equally engaged in parking issues. The lack of monthly parking permits in particular is seen as a hindrance to marketing Downtown office space, and one of the biggest reasons for companies leaving Downtown space. Some feel that they

could fill vacant space at a premium if permits at a nearby facility were generally available, opening the potential for market-pricing strategies at monthly facilities.