



**WALKER**  
PARKING CONSULTANTS

DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY

CITY OF MILL VALLEY



MILL VALLEY, CA

Prepared for:  
CITY OF MILL VALLEY  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

JANUARY 2008



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January 21, 2008

Wayne Bush  
City of Mill Valley  
Department of Public Works  
26 Corte Madera Avenue)  
Mill Valley, CA 94941

Re: *Downtown Mill Valley Parking Study*  
*Project No. 33-1487.00*

Dear Mr. Bush,

Walker Parking Consultants is pleased to submit our final report on parking demand and management in Downtown Mill Valley.

We look forward to discussing our findings with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

WALKER PARKING CONSULTANTS

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carolyn H. Krasnow".

Carolyn Krasnow  
Principal, Director of Study Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rachel Reside".

Rachel Reside  
Parking Analyst

Enclosure

cc:



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Mill Valley hired Walker Parking Consultants (“Walker”) to prepare a Parking Study of the downtown area. The downtown area is very busy, and people in the City have been concerned that parking is already, or will soon become, problematic. The primary purpose of the study is to provide the City with an assessment of the current downtown parking system and to make appropriate recommendations that address identified problems and help the City manage its parking system efficiently for the future.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***BASELINE CONDITIONS***

Walker collected data in February, May and June of 2007 to acquire an inventory of the public and private parking supply, determine the peak parking demand, survey the length of time vehicles were parked, and determine the frequency of parking space turnover.

The following are summations of our findings:

- A total of 1,193 spaces were counted within the downtown study area boundaries. Public on-street spaces totaled 597, public off-street spaces totaled 267, and private off-street spaces totaled 329.
- The baseline peak demand on a weekday was observed at 12 p.m. and 7 p.m. on a Wednesday in February, with 71 and 68 percent of the supply occupied, respectively. This includes both public and private parking.
- The baseline peak demand on a weekend was observed at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on a February Saturday, with 72 and 71 percent of the supply occupied, respectively. This includes both public and private parking.
- Counts done in late June to check for seasonal variations showed occupancy rates that were very similar to February’s counts.
- Private parking lots were generally underutilized. The peak occupancy observed was 213 spaces (or 65 percent occupied) which occurred on a weekday afternoon.
- Omitting the private supply, Walker found that the public parking supply achieved a peak occupancy rate of 84 percent on a February Saturday.
- License plate surveys indicated that on Saturday, when meters are not in effect and time limits still apply, vehicles were parked for longer periods than permissible.
- Employees have a significant impact on area parking, but it appears to be the influx of visitor demand starting at the noon hour that creates 100 percent occupancy conditions on free, residential streets.

At present, the downtown does not have a parking problem, but is approaching the limits of its public parking system’s ability to meet demand. Due to the fact that circulation on roadways and within lots becomes problematic before every space is filled, we consider the parking system to be impacted prior to being 100

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percent occupied. The “effective capacity” of the parking system in Mill Valley is just over 86 percent. The occupancy rates in the public parking areas are approaching that point. Thus, the parking system is not approaching full capacity, but it is nearing the point when circulation will be impeded. Parking is impacted in key parking areas in the downtown core, while the periphery is significantly less utilized.

### **FUTURE CONDITIONS**

The downtown is largely built out; City staff is not expecting a significant amount of new square footage to be built downtown. However, it is possible that downtown building or business owners will want to convert existing commercial spaces to more intense generators of parking demand (e.g., a retail store becomes a restaurant, which can generate roughly five times more cars than a shop). Significant levels of intensification would create a need for more parking.

Walker evaluated several sites for new parking development. The Municipal Lot off Throckmorton is too narrow for a garage. The lot at the Greenwood School/Mt. Carmel Church is large enough to build a garage, albeit an inefficient one. The City, if it teamed with the owner of the lot, would need to provide spaces for the land uses already using the lot.

It is our opinion that it is premature for the City to consider building parking. It is not yet clear that the level of parking demand will grow to the point that a garage is needed, and underutilized garages are problematic on several fronts. That said, we recommend preparing for the possibility by reinvigorating the in-lieu fee process that is already on the books. A financial consultant can update the fee schedule and help the City organize the fund. In-lieu fees allow developers to pay the City for code-required spaces they need to provide, instead of building the spaces themselves. This allows the City to plan for efficient, public, centralized parking resources and spares the developer having to find a place to build spaces. The City collects the in-lieu fees in a fund, and builds parking at the point that it is needed. In-lieu fee systems are increasingly used in California, and allow the City to adopt a wait-and-see attitude with regard to parking development. They also provide flexibility to make whatever parking improvements are needed to support the area.

### **PARKING MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

As part of the analysis, Walker was asked to evaluate the existing parking system and provide recommendations for improvements. The following are the key recommendations of the report:

1. Several predominantly residential streets with four-hour time limits were near 100 percent occupancy during many survey periods. These streets include Throckmorton from Olive to Madrona, Lovell from Olive to Corte Madera, Laurelwood, and Parkwood. Sometimes these streets fill before metered streets closer in to the core, indicating that they are used as a free alternative. Walker recommends installing meters on these streets to promote a more balanced use of parking resources. Residents would, of course, be exempt from meter restrictions. Subsequently, the City should evaluate Sunnyside and Buena Vista (east of Blithedale), Forrest (from Presidio to Blithedale) and Bayview (from Madrona to Corte Madera), and consider metering those streets as well.
2. Where new meters are installed or old ones replaced, we recommend considering electronic multispace meters instead of traditional meters that must be installed at each parking space. Multispace meters offer

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more payment options, are more aesthetically pleasing, and have better utilization and revenue tracking capabilities.

3. The City should work with owners of private lots to try to make better use of underutilized areas. Owners may not be willing to create a fully public lot, but they may be willing to lease some spaces for monthly permit parking. We recommend hiring a consultant with experience in real estate transactions and negotiations to begin discussions between the City and stakeholders.
4. Employee/Resident/two-hour parking areas can be extended beyond the study area to include Presidio, Oakdale, Gardner and Lovell (west of Olive).
5. If additional employee parking is needed after private space are leased and the City augments the employee supply, the City can opt to give a limited number of permits for metered residential streets. The number of permits should be watched to guard against returning to the congestion that is currently an issue for these streets.
6. Meters should be enforced on Saturdays as well as weekdays. Downtown customers are used to paying for parking, so adding Saturday should not be a problem. Doing so will promote better turnover, and it will be more consistent and less confusing.
7. On-street meter prices should increase by 25¢ per hour. As a general rule, on-street parking in the core should be more expensive than off-street resources, and should be priced as a premium resource. Meter rates should be increased periodically, just as other City services are.
8. The City should continue to work towards encouraging alternative modes of transit, including buses, carpools, and bicycling. People tend to be reluctant to give up single-passenger autos unless there is significant incentive to do so. Rates tend to be a key factor, but providing convenient alternatives is a start.
9. The City should prepare to create on-street ADA parking spaces in accordance with the Access Board's 2005 Draft Guidelines when these Guidelines are finalized, and when the Department of Justice has specified how modifications to existing elements should be made.
10. Signage guiding drivers to public lots, including the Municipal Lot on Throckmorton and the public lot next to Mill Valley Plaza, should be improved; these facilities are not well marked. The City does not control the private (but publicly available) lot serving the shops next to The Depot, but should consider talking about improved signage for that lot as well. The lot is open to the public but signage discourages its use.
11. The City's website should include a map showing public parking facilities.
12. Walker does not recommend creating compact stalls. The number of spaces gained can easily be offset by the number of cars parking across the stall line and effectively taking up two spaces. Cars sales data do not yet support a trend towards significantly smaller cars. The current City code specifying a 9' width provides a high level of service. This can be decreased to 8'9" without adversely affecting the parking, but compact stalls are not advised.
13. Back-in angled parking on both sides of Miller next to the Depot could add four to six stalls. Our preliminary analysis indicates that it would leave a narrower roadway than City Code supports. A traffic engineer would need to provide a thorough analysis of this plan.