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CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSIONS

JANUARY 2008

PROJECT # 33-1487.00

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **SURVEY FINDINGS**

In summary, the downtown does not currently have a parking problem, but is nearing the limits of its public parking system's ability to accommodate demand. The peak occupancy observed in the public parking spaces was 730 spaces, which represents 84 percent of the supply occupied. This occurred on a Saturday afternoon. We consider the parking system to become impacted before it is 100 percent full, as circulation on roadways and in lots becomes a problem before every space is filled. Taking this into consideration, the public system is already near its "effective capacity." This means that there are still a considerable number of spaces available in the system overall, but demand is high enough, especially in the core of the downtown, that many blocks are filling to 100 percent of capacity and parkers may be circling the blocks looking for a space, or parking farther from their destination than they consider optimal.

Key findings from our data collection include:

- Many of the residential avenues with four-hour/residential permit restrictions had very high parking occupancies. Lovell Avenue from Corte Madera to Olive, Laurelwood, Parkwood, and the north side of Throckmorton from Madrona to Olive were above their effective supplies in many counts. These blocks sometimes filled before metered spaces closer to the core of downtown.
  - While these spaces are partly used by employees, it is the influx of retail customers and diners starting at around noon that brings these blocks' occupancy to 100 percent.
- On Saturdays, meters are not in effect. Time limits are, but our license plate surveys indicated that in some places – the Municipal Lot on Throckmorton in particular – cars were parking for long periods. These were likely employee cars. The employee areas along Miller Avenue were not as heavily utilized on Saturday as on the weekday, suggesting that employees use closer resources when the meters are not enforced. This creates shortages for high-turnover customer parking in core areas.
- Private lots were underutilized, as was the publicly-available, privately-owned lot on block 9. That lot charges non-customers \$2 per hour.
- The edges of the study area tended to exhibit lower occupancy rates during our surveys, despite being free (and sometimes unrestricted) parking areas. Presumably this trend continues just beyond the borders of the study area, providing an overflow resource that was not included in the scope of the study.

A turnover analysis showed many people overstaying time limits at metered spaces, particularly on Saturday. At the time of the surveys, the Police Department was under-staffed and looking to hire an additional enforcement officer. They have since done that. According to enforcement staff, the ability to monitor the parking more thoroughly has improved the situation described by our turnover data. More employees are now buying permits instead of trying to get away with overstaying meters. Though the situation has improved, there are still two conclusions to be drawn from the data. First, it is important not to underestimate the importance of enforcement efforts in keeping a parking system in balance. If long-term parkers know they can

JANUARY 2008

PROJECT # 33-1487.00

get away with using short-term spaces, they will. This will create shortages for customers. Second, the fact that overstays at two-hour meters jumped from 30 percent on a weekday to 53 percent on a Saturday shows the extent to which the use of time limits instead of fees at the meters on Saturdays affects the way these areas are used. Clearly, it is more difficult to maintain high-turnover parking when time limits rather than rates are in place.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The report suggests options for improving the operation of the parking system, including management practices and physical changes to the parking system. The recommendations are summarized below; please refer to the body of the report for a detailed discussion of each point.

### PARKING MANAGEMENT

1. The City should consider converting four-hour free spaces on Throckmorton (Olive to Madrona), Lovell (Olive to Corte Madera), Laurelwood, and Parkwood to 4-hour metered spaces. These residential streets were at or near 100 percent occupancy during many of our survey periods, often before employee permit spaces or metered spaces got as busy. Installing meters will help balance demand between these streets and commercial areas. If this change creates a situation where other streets become impacted, the City should consider metering Sunnyside and Buena Vista (east of Blithedale), Forrest (from Presidio to Blithedale) and Bayview (from Madrona to Corte Madera) as well.
2. Where new meters are installed or old ones are replaced, the City should investigate switching to electronic multispace meters. One meter can handle an entire block if desired, which makes them aesthetically more pleasing than traditional meters lined up at each stall. They also provide audit capabilities, make change and accept credit cards.
3. The City should work with the owners of private lots to see if it is feasible to use some spaces in private lots for employee parking. These spaces could be on the same permit system as the Miller Avenue stalls, with the lot owner getting the revenue. Shared parking agreements of this kind are difficult to arrange, but worth trying.
4. Employee parking resources can be extended beyond the study area to include Presidio, Oakdale, Gardner, and Lovell (west of Olive).
5. If leasing private spaces and augmenting employee supplies are not sufficient to create enough employee spaces to offset the number currently using residential zones that will be metered, the City can offer discounted parking at those meters, or sell a limited number of permits for residential zones. The City would still be able to manage congestion on those streets.
6. Meters should be enforced on Saturdays as well as weekdays. The current system is more confusing than helpful, and unnecessary.



JANUARY 2008

PROJECT # 33-1487.00

7. Meter prices should increase by 25¢ per hour. In general, premium on-street parking should be more expensive than off-street parking. Meter rates should be increased every few years.
8. The City should continue to work on alternatives to the single-passenger auto. With parking rates as low as they are, it will be difficult to change people's habits. That said, bike lanes and lockers, premium carpool spaces and frequent transit service all make it easier for people to consider alternatives seriously. Ultimately, rates in the City will need to increase significantly before alternative modes gain more attention.

### **PHYSICAL LAYOUT AND SIGNAGE**

1. Walker recommends that the City prepare to meet the requirements for accessible parking in public rights-of-way as published in the Access Board's 2005 Draft Guidelines. Though it is not yet required, and the Department of Justice has yet to state how modifications to existing elements should be made, on-street accessible parking is likely to become a requirement. This will apply to marked stalls, and will be based on the number of spaces on the perimeter of a block.
2. Signage directing parkers to public lots should be improved. Entrances to the Municipal Lot off Throckmorton and the public lot next to Mill Valley Plaza are not well marked. Signage for the publicly-available, privately-owned lot near the Depot also needs improvement, as it dissuades the public from using that valuable resource. The City does not control that lot.
3. The City should create a map on its webpage to show parking resources.
4. The City is interested to see if decreasing stall sizes and adding compact stalls is worthwhile. Code suggests a 9' width. This is the best level of service. Going to an 8'6" stall in off-street lots would not adversely impact the parking system, but we do not recommend compact stalls. Too many large cars use them and park over the lines, creating wasted spaces. On-street angled parking is best left at 9'0".
5. The City expressed interest in creating angled parking on Miller, across from the Depot (and across from existing angled stalls). The City asked Walker to examine the possibility of back-in stalls. It would be possible to add back-in stalls, and there would be a net gain of four to six stalls over the existing count of parallel stalls. However, the driving lane would be over a foot short of City code. This issue requires further examination by a traffic engineer.

### **FUTURE GROWTH AND PLANNING**

Code requirements are average to high for commercial land uses other than restaurants. They are similar to typical codes for stand-alone uses. Parking generation rates may be lower in the downtown core due to alternative transit, proximity of residences and shared use between different types of businesses. The Miller Avenue Precise Plan has recommended reduced retail, restaurant and office codes for that project area due to the shared use nature of the area. Downtown areas generally do experience reduced rates similar to those described by the Miller Avenue Precise Plan and the proposed Miller Avenue ratios may be applicable to the downtown study area as well; more research on current generation rates in the downtown area is recommended. The office requirement should be lower.

Mill Valley does not plan on adding new square footage; the downtown is built out. However, intensification of existing square footage, if it occurs, will require additional parking. The Church Lot will provide enough spaces to allow more flexibility than currently exists, but will not accommodate enough cars to allow for a

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JANUARY 2008

PROJECT # 33-1487.00

significant change in the downtown landscape. That would require additional resources. The Municipal lot is not a candidate for parking garage construction. Given the lack of efficient footprints in the area, it is possible demolition would be required. It is our opinion that construction of a garage should not be pursued unless there is clear need. We recommend re-invigorating the in-lieu fee program and seeing how many business owners choose to intensify their space and pay the in-lieu fees. If a lot of business owners convert retail to restaurants and pay the fees, there will be funds to help support garage construction. There will also be a clear demand, as parking demand will increase before a garage is built. This wait-and-see approach will allow the City to accumulate funds, and also to avoid building a garage that turns out to be unnecessary and underutilized.