

## Background

A vibrant and successful downtown is a benefit to all Los Altos residents, and good traffic and parking management is a key component to that success. The parking “alternatives” subcommittee evaluated options to manage parking supply as well as some of the many options to reduce demand or increase supply.

The City-Wide Parking Committee received the initial alternatives subcommittee draft report August 5, and revised draft reports Sept. 2 and Oct. 7. The report was presented at a Study Session with PTC, Nov. 19. The report was revised following Council action Jan. 26, 2016.

## Discussion/Recommendations

### Parking management

- *Standing Parking Committee.* Establish a standing parking committee to recommend changes and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of any implemented changes. “Set it and forget it” is not good policy.<sup>1</sup> This committee should be balanced and represent all groups with an interest in parking and traffic - residents, business owners and property owners. Many of the existing city commissions have an interest and expertise and should be encouraged to participate. A city staff member should be assigned to support the committee.
- *Time limits.* Time limits set to achieve 85% peak use facilitate good use of the available space and are one of the most important tools for parking management,<sup>2</sup> yet time limits are barely discussed in the CDM Smith 2013 Report.<sup>3</sup> Attachment 1 shows current conditions. Shorter time limits (90 minutes) on Main, State and Plazas 4, 5 and 6 (the Central Plazas) would encourage employee parking in Plazas 1-3 and 7-10, thus freeing up the more desirable spaces for customers. Improved signage should be considered with or without any changes to time limits. The 90 minute limit at Safeway seems to be working well. Moreover, most customers need less than 60 minutes (65% of those using on-street parking).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there is continued concern about the impact of shorter time limits on downtown customers. Menlo Park downtown parking is a mix of street parking with one and two hour limits, plazas with two hour limits, and two plazas with parking meter kiosks allowing longer term parking. Menlo Park also have a policy of no re-parking in the same plaza. This interesting mix

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<sup>1</sup> Parking Management for Smart Growth, Richard Willson, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Parking Management for Smart Growth, Richard Willson, p. 37

<sup>3</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 68, <http://www.losaltosca.gov/community/page/downtown-parking-management-plan>

<sup>4</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 40, Table 1-16

of time limits deserves further evaluation by the Standing Parking Committee, and no recommendation is being made by the subcommittee.

- *Permits.* Permits (white dot program) to move long term parkers (employees) to more distant locations allows customers better access to close locations. The CDM Smith 2013 Report recommended that the white dot program be expanded<sup>5</sup> and 111 spaces were added to the existing 533, giving a total of 644 spaces.<sup>6</sup> Los Altos sells 1000 annual permits and 100 quarterly permits. The subcommittee discovered that permits are currently “sold out,” the second straight year that annual permits have been sold out.<sup>7</sup> This leads some employees to use parking that is better suited for customers. Since there is typically parking available in the remote lots (8, 9, 10), the subcommittee recommends that 200 more annual permits be made available.<sup>8</sup> The subcommittee also recommends a price increase from \$36/year. Menlo Park charges \$592; Palo Alto charges \$466. If Los Altos raises the fee to \$120, there is the potential of more than \$144,000 in funding to support parking programs. Protection for low wage employees must be considered. The subcommittee recommends that the increased price be evaluated by the Standing Parking Committee, and no specific price recommendation is being made at this time
- *Sensors.* Real time guidance, e.g., sensors + app, allows users to locate available parking spaces. This avoids wasteful and time consuming driving (substantial traffic at peak demand can be due to “cruising,” looking for an open spot).<sup>9</sup> There is a cost to install and maintain sensors on Main, State and the Central Plazas (about 400 stalls). This option is not recommended at this time.
- *Smart Meters.* Smart Meters with dynamic pricing allow more spaces to be available when actually needed. Smart Meters are successfully used in many cities, and can be cost effective with as few as 200 meters.<sup>10</sup> The recommended Smart Meter option is to install meters on Main, State and the Central Plaza (400 meters). The cost is estimated at \$800/meter.<sup>11</sup> Dynamic pricing encourages turn-over as pricing can go up over time. The first 20 minutes can be free, then the rate can be 50 or 75 cents/hour. It is dynamic in that the effect on parking can be measured, and the hourly charge adjusted to achieve the 85% peak use goal. There is concern that meters are not consistent with the look and charm of Los Altos. Carmel installed smart meters in January, and took them out in July, partly for that reason.<sup>12</sup> This option is not recommended at this time.

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<sup>5</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 60

<sup>6</sup> James Walgren, Community Development Director, personal communication

<sup>7</sup> Tuck Younis, Chief of Police, personal communication

<sup>8</sup> At the recommendation of the Economic Development Manager, City Council on Jan. 26, 2016, increased the supply from 1000 to 1300.

<sup>9</sup> Parking Management for Smart Growth, Richard Willson, p. 33

<sup>10</sup> Richard Willson, Professor and Chair, Urban & Regional Planning, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, personal communication

<sup>11</sup> Chris Degrel, Regional Sales Manager, Duncan Solutions, personal communication

<sup>12</sup> Tom Leyde, Monterey Herald, 6/25/2015

- *Enforcement.* Enforcement is an essential tool for parking management, although it has the potential to create considerable ill will. The CDM Smith 2013 Report recommends graduated fines, first citation at \$54.50, second at \$90.80, third and subsequent at \$151.40 with a reset each 12 months.<sup>13</sup> The subcommittee recommends a warning citation with the first offense, second at \$54.50, third and subsequent at \$90.80. We do not support the \$151.40 fine (too extreme).<sup>14</sup> We do support a warning citation with the first offense whenever significant changes are made to the parking management strategy, e.g., the recent start of enforcement on Mondays and Saturdays. The enhanced enforcement resulted in an initial increase in parking tickets, but the level has since returned to normal.<sup>15</sup> Enforcement will be further enhanced with the use of modern technology, e.g. a license plate reader. Menlo Park has successfully used hand-held readers for more than seven years.<sup>16</sup> A license plate reader will allow data collection on the use of Los Altos parking, and all records collected other than for violators can be purged at the end of the day.<sup>17</sup>

## Reducing demand

Some of the quickest ways to manage parking are options to reduce demand.

- *Bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure.* Bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure enhancements are important. The CDM Smith 2013 Report recommended several changes.<sup>18</sup> The subcommittee considered the addition of more bicycle racks along Main and State, including artistic bike racks, and one or two bike parklets. The full committee simply recommends that we encourage the implementation of the Bicycle Transportation Plan.
- *Car share apps.* Car share apps, e.g., GetSafeGo, reduce the number of cars in town. There are a number of appropriate apps that, combined with an education campaign directed primarily at employees, can reduce demand. This is not likely to have a large impact, but the cost is low, so it should be considered by the Standing Parking Committee.
- *Valet parking.* Valet parking has been used during peak holiday seasons and it could be used during peak lunch time demand. A valet service for employees to encourage parking on Lincoln Ave near the churches would divert many cars from Plaza parking and would be useful with shared parking (see below). There may be partners willing to sponsor the lunch valet option. The Standing Parking Committee should continue to evaluate the feasibility.

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<sup>13</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 58

<sup>14</sup> At the recommendation of the Economic Development Manager, City Council on Jan. 26, 2016, adopted graduated fines with the first and second citation at \$54.50, and subsequent at \$151.40.

<sup>15</sup> Tuck Younis, Chief of Police, personal communication

<sup>16</sup> Ashley Walker, Menlo Park Police Department, personal communication

<sup>17</sup> At the recommendation of the Economic Development Manager, City Council on Jan. 26, 2016, adopted the use of iParq, a non-license plate reader parking enforcement technology.

<sup>18</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 69

- *Shuttle service.* Shuttle buses make public transit a more useful option. Shuttle buses are of interest to a large number of employees and would be of immediate and significant value. This is of great interest to employers as well, as it would expand the pool of potential employees. The subcommittee wrote a survey (attachment 2), visited 120 businesses and surveyed 240 employees. The results reveal that 38% of employees would consider using a shuttle between the transit stops (train and bus) in Mountain View and downtown Los Altos. There is a clear distribution by age and geography. Younger workers are more interested and a large number of workers living in Mountain View, Menlo Park, Redwood City and San Jose are interested. Most workers living in Los Altos are not interested (the commute is easy), and most workers in Sunnyvale and very remote locations are not interested (they do not have good access to public transit heading to Mountain View). The interest in a shuttle primarily relates to problems with commuting, not problems with parking. The Packard Foundation has shown that a shuttle service can be effective.<sup>19</sup> The subcommittee survey didn't explore a shuttle for the greater Los Altos area or for seniors, but several people have suggested it and this expanded service may make the effort more attractive. A joint program with VTA, Mountain View, Stanford, or Foothill College may be possible. This is a long-term measure and the Standing Parking Committee should continue to evaluate the feasibility.
- *Autonomous shuttle.* The autonomous shuttle may be a useful option and would reduce the cost of shuttle service and allow better coverage. The possibility of a pilot program in Los Altos is exciting and was recently discussed with Google.<sup>20</sup> It is premature at this time, but should be kept in mind.
- *Transit passes.* Transit passes (e.g., VTA Bus, Caltrain, Uber) can make public transit a more viable option for employees, and such programs, both public and private have been successfully used. The Standing Parking Committee should continue to evaluate the feasibility.

## **Increasing supply**

Creative use of the existing parking supply offers the most attractive options to increase supply.

- *Shared parking.* Shared parking arrangements to make privately held space available to the public increases parking supply and generates revenue for the property owner. The zoning standards for parking need to be considered and a survey of private spaces in the downtown triangle, both commercial and residential (condominiums) conducted, but the potential is significant. Converting privately held space to public use must make financial sense to the property owners. A reverse auction can be used to establish fair market value. Making the space available to just one or two businesses with large numbers of employees (e.g., restaurants) might make it more attractive to

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<sup>19</sup> Curt Riffle, Program Officer, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, personal communication

<sup>20</sup> Davis White, Manager, Community & Public Affairs, Google, personal communication

the property owners. This is not considered a quick fix option, but the Standing Parking Committee should continue to evaluate the feasibility.

- *Internet apps.* Internet apps, e.g., SpotOn Parking, make it possible for privately owned space to be made available to members of the app group and generate revenue to the property owner. Privately held space is available but this approach is less appealing as it is open to a largely uncontrolled group of participants and the revenue stream is uncertain. This option is probably not worth the nuisance to most property owners, but it could become an important element of a shared parking solution and the Standing Parking Committee should continue to evaluate the feasibility.

## **Conclusion**

The “alternatives” subcommittee evaluated fifteen options that contribute to effective parking management, including options to reduce demand and increase supply and has recommended five for implementation and three for continued evaluation.

Two additional options to increase supply considered by the City-Wide Parking Committee are included for completeness.

- *Restriping.* Restriping the plazas is being considered separately. The small diagonal areas that will be created provide good locations for bike lockers.
- *Structured parking.* Structured parking will dramatically increase supply. A 396 stall garage built on Plaza 2 or Plaza 7 with three levels of parking in a two-story above-ground structure has been estimated at \$10.5 million.<sup>21</sup> This could be privately financed with the city providing the land, and there are city funds set aside for such a project.<sup>22</sup> This approach will likely take considerable time, it is expensive at \$26,500 per stall, and it requires that the land be provided by the city at no cost.

## **Quick Fixes**

- Establish a Standing Parking Committee with a balance composition and City staff support.
- Raise the permit fee (amount to be determined by the Standing Parking Committee).
- Use iParq parking enforcement technology to evaluate and better understand parking demand.
- Encourage implementation of the Bicycle Transportation Plan.

## **Long-Term Fixes**

- Evaluate the feasibility of valet parking.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a shuttle service connecting public transit in Mountain View to downtown Los Altos.
- Evaluate the feasibility of shared parking.

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<sup>21</sup> CDM Smith 2013 Report, p. 94

<sup>22</sup> James Walgren, Community Development Director, personal communication

**Matrix of recommended options**

The eight key recommendations by the Alternatives Subcommittee, with estimated increase, if any, to the supply, and cost.

<b>Option</b>	<b>Increased Supply</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Standing Committee	0	low
Increased Permit Fee	0	low
Use iParq to Study Demand	0	low
Bicycle Infrastructure	low	med
Valet Parking	100+	med
Shared Parking	200	med
Shuttle Service	200+	high