

MEMORANDUM

LOS ALTOS CITYWIDE PARKING COMMITTEE WORK REVIEW



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DATE: JANUARY 12, 2017

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PROJECT NAME: CITYWIDE PARKING COMMITTEE WORK REVIEW

PROJECT NUMBER: 33-1916.00

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF CITYWIDE PARKING COMMITTEE WORK

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The following memorandum is an evaluation of the Citywide Parking Committee's (henceforth "Committee") findings and conclusions regarding its analysis of parking ratios (i.e., minimum parking requirements), parking in lieu fees, supply and demand, and other parking related issues considered. This document highlights those areas in the Committee's analysis that appear to be appropriate and those which may require further analysis or clarification.

The goal of the Committee's work was to identify the causes of parking problems in Los Altos and to determine reasonable measures that can be taken to address these parking problems. It is Walker's understanding that the analysis performed by the Committee attempts to address many of the parking issues Los Altos faces today.

Overall we found the Committee's analysis to be practical and forward thinking. The ideas presented in the main report and the subcommittee reports reflect current approaches to the parking issues Los Altos faces. Based on the documents Walker reviewed, we identified the central parking issues to be a shortage of parking spaces and a lack of parking revenue to fund the improvement, maintenance, management, and operation of the parking system.

Upon reviewing the Committee's work we have preliminarily concluded that the report may not sufficiently encompass all elements needed to address the problems of the parking system as a whole. It is our preliminary conclusion that the solutions presented do not result in a comprehensive parking solution, but rather on an issue-by-issue basis, which may be less effective.

The Committee identified the following causes for the parking problems in Los Altos:

1. Loss of parking supply through street beautification projects;
2. Sale of City property that had been available for public parking;

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3. Waivers or exceptions granted to development projects with deficient parking (per current requirements) that impact public parking supply without any mitigation or impact fee to correct or improve the parking situation;
4. Outdated and inefficient parking stall standards;
5. Parking requirements that do not reflect actual parking demand; and
6. Minimum parking requirements that may be subjective, relying on applicant-supplied data rather than what some consider to be more objective data.

Most of these causes are related to the parking supply. For example, Number 1 from the list above mentions an actual loss of supply. Numbers 2 and 3 represent an opportunity cost of the loss of future parking supply. Number 4 represents an inefficient supply in that stall standards are deemed inefficient.

To address these problems, the Committee presented the following recommendations:

1. Revise the City's parking regulations including minimum parking requirements;
2. Revise stall standards;
3. Approve a parking in lieu fee program (option for a payment in lieu of required parking) that generates funds for future parking improvements;
4. Establish a standing parking Committee; and
5. Consider alternatives for reducing parking demand and managing existing parking supply.

In short, through its recommendations the Committee seeks to set forth the parking parameters for Los Altos to:

- Maintain its village appeal by right-sizing minimum parking requirements and preventing oversupply;
- Raise revenue through parking in-lieu fees for improvements, maintenance, and operation of public parking; and
- Create a group of stakeholders informed about local parking issues, through the creation of a standing parking Committee.

The recommendations presented by the Committee, if executed properly, may be adequate to address some issues, such as raising revenue for the parking system. Still, they don't directly address the fundamental issue of a shortage of supply. As such, there are some aspects of this analysis that the City may wish to explore further. An example is the lack of specific mention of on-street parking, both in terms of policy in general and demand specifically. A reasonable question is the extent to which the demand for on-street parking demand and the policies influencing that demand contribute to the problems Los Altos faces today? Are on-street spaces

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generally full? How often do these spaces turn over? Knowing the answer to these and related questions will likely give the City a more holistic view of its parking problems, and thus provide vital information to alleviate some of the problems that Los Altos is facing with regard to its public parking supply.

EVALUATION OF FINDINGS

Based on our review of the report and subcommittee reports provided, Walker determined that the parking issues Los Altos faces fall into one of two two categories, a shortage of supply (either perceived or actual), and the lack of revenue to provide parking improvements or to fund operation and challenges regarding the maintenance of public parking facilities. The loss of parking through street beautification and the sale of land slated for parking, the approval of development projects with deficient parking, and the approval of changes of use to more parking intensive land uses have resulted in increased parking demand for the limited supply in the Downtown parking plazas without providing either additional supply or revenue to maintain the current parking assets. As such, the Committee sought to address the causes of those problems that have led to the apparent parking supply shortage.

The following section provides further detail regarding Walker's review of specific Committee recommendations.

PARKING RATIOS (MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS)

The current parking ratios used in the City's minimum parking requirements have been cited as hindering businesses' ability to open or expand. As a result, the City approved waivers and exceptions for development projects, allowing projects that did not meet the City's minimum parking requirements to move forward. However, consequences of the waivers have been identified as a strain on the limited supply of public parking in Downtown's parking plazas as well as an appearance of unfairness; the discretionary process results in variances and exceptions for some projects but not others.

In addition, despite the identified shortage of parking supply, the Committee found that the current parking ratios are too high and "out of tune with the village character of Los Altos," and therefore need to be adjusted.

While "right-sizing" (which tends to favor reducing) minimum parking requirements is a forward thinking planning practice, it seems counterintuitive to lower requirements given the consensus that the supply of parking is insufficient in the Downtown area. However, the consideration of reducing minimum parking requirements suggests that there may not be an actual shortage of supply, but rather a perceived shortage, that may be perpetuated by limited parking management. In such cases, demand for parking is high in some locations, but lower in out of way locations. The result is that adding more spaces tends not to ameliorate the shortage of parking spaces in high demand areas; it only adds spaces in lower demand locations.

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Evidence of this is shown in the subcommittee report regarding the creation of a parking in-lieu program (PILP). The report states "Parking policies have led to excess unused private stalls outside of the OPD in the Downtown Triangle." The presence of unused stalls (while private), presents an opportunity for increased capacity of the Downtown public parking system through lease agreements with private parking owners.

Nonetheless, the idea to lower parking ratios are an attempt to preserve the village aesthetic of Los Altos. Additionally, the lowering of ratios is meant to facilitate development and raise parking revenues through a PILP.

RECOMMENDED MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS

As per the actual ratio recommendations, the approach to right-sizing minimum parking requirements is sound. Per the subcommittee report on parking ratios, the Committee vetted several parking studies, benchmarked ratios with comparable cities, and used local data to determine parking demand for the various land uses found in the City, a rational and sound approach.

One question we raise regarding the methodology is whether the Committee has collected enough data points at peak hours to feel comfortable making recommendations for adjusting the minimum parking requirements for all of the uses that have proposed changes.

CONSIDERATION OF AN EXPANDED PARKING DISTRICT (EPD)

Per the subcommittee reports, the Original Parking District (OPD) was formed in the 1950s to create parking plazas to be shared among the property owners who contributed to the assessment district. Assessments were used to fund the purchase and construction of the parking plazas. However, no assessments are collected from owners for improvements or the ongoing maintenance of the parking plazas, only the initial construction and land costs.

The City has taken ownership of the plazas, and the Committee has proposed to 1) expand the OPD to create a new Expanded Parking District (EPD), and 2) create a Parking In-Lieu Program (PILP) that would provide "key funding for new parking resources." Per the proposed municipal code, the recommendation for the PILP revenue is to fund the expansion of parking capacity through: restriping, construction of a garage, leasing of private stalls, shuttles to nearby parking, valet parking, and subsidized carpooling.

While the idea to both expand the parking district and create an in lieu fee program is positive as it addresses the issue of the parking supply shortage and revenue shortage, challenges regarding possible outcomes should be considered. For instance, the PILP aims to ensure that the City maintains its village appeal while raising revenue for parking improvements. It is likely that funding adequate to provide meaningful additions to the parking supply will take a long time. Unless effective parking management measures are in effect, the parking supply problem could be exacerbated until sufficient revenue is raised to provide new spaces.

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Compounding this challenge is the possibility that OPD-adjacent property owners may not want to “buy in” as they may already benefit from the parking plazas at no cost to them. We raise the question; why would a property owner agree to join the EPD to be charged for the same parking that they already use? While one can envision a scenario in which a system of parking permits may be provided to only those businesses or properties that contribute to the expanded district, the benefits of such a program once again comes down to the effectiveness of the parking management effort.

In addition, as stated in the revised (provisional) code there is no guarantee of where the new parking supply would be placed. This uncertainty may also dissuade OPD-adjacent property owners from joining the EPD as they may feel that new parking supplies may not benefit them if they are located far away.

It is possible that the threat of the exacerbation of the parking problem, which hurts most properties in the Downtown area not only the OPD businesses, could provide the impetus for OPD-adjacent property owners to join the EPD given the collective benefit to all Downtown business owners, not only the OPD.

CONSIDERATION OF A PARKING IN-LIEU PROGRAM (PILP)

Generally, the PILP presents a positive effort to raise revenue for parking improvements. The recommendation to allow different options for paying the fees (e.g., lump sum, fully amortized, or a lease program of \$1,500 per annum) is positive as it allows property owners flexibility in paying. Still, the PILP's success is highly contingent upon several factors including:

- The amount of the fees to be paid. If fees are set too high developers may stay away;
- The amount of new development or changes of use that may occur, generating parking in lieu fees;
- Property owners “buying in,” as they may already be benefitting from the parking plazas at no cost; and
- And, ensuring that there is consistent revenue to pay for maintenance and operation of the system.

Should the PILP fall short in meeting its intended outcome, the incorporation of parking management strategies, such as, paid parking may help to generate consistent cash flow to pay for improvements, maintenance, and operation of the Downtown public parking system.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PARKING MANAGEMENT

One subcommittee report presented ideas for improved parking system management. All of the sections presented in this report (creation of a standing parking committee, time limits, expansion of permits, sensors, smart meters, and enforcement) are thoughtful and applicable

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to the Committee's findings. However, one goal that stands out is that turnover of spaces is meant to be achieved through time limits.

In our experience studying parking patterns in commercial districts in smaller cities where paid parking is not in effect, employees and business owners tend to occupy the most convenient spaces, even if those spaces are time-limited. These observations are standard within the parking field. In areas where enforcement of time limits is efficient, which is a challenging and labor-intensive effort, employees tend to make sure to move their vehicles before time limits expire to ensure that they are not issued a citation. The "two-hour dance" and "employee shuffle" are terms coined to describe this behavior in other small California cities. When employees vacate a time-limited space, they try to find parking in a similar location to where they were parked previously, locking out many visitors/customers from finding convenient parking.

The City offers permit parking for employees at a rate of \$36 annually, and \$12 quarterly. Per the Committee's report, these have sold out in the last year, and the Committee recommends allowing for more permits to be sold in the near future, as it is perceived that some employees are parking in the most convenient spaces meant for customers and other visitors, given that they are not able to purchase permits. This is a reasonable solution to address the issue of employees not being able to purchase permits, but it does not guarantee that many employees will not continue to use the most convenient spaces, especially if they can continue to park and move their vehicles before time limits expire.

Upon review of this section, Walker would like to better understand how often the time-limited spaces (both on and off street) are actually turning over. Our concern is that on-street spaces not turning over as intended add to the perception of a shortage in the parking supply. In our experience, where time limits are the only means by which parking turnover is encouraged, approximately 30% to 40% of spaces may be used by employee parkers during the peak hour.

While the perception of paid parking is often negative, it is an effective tool for reducing or eliminating the use of parking spaces designated for employees. The report indicates that the Committee understands the potential for smart meters to increase turnover, thereby effectively creating additional spaces without having to spend resources to build additional capacity. This has been our experience as well; increased turnover of prime parking spaces effectively increases the capacity of the parking system. Moreover, meters can be a way to generate revenue to pay for maintenance, operation, and improvements to the public parking system. If the City decides to pursue installation of smart meters, it can start with a pilot program in a select area of Downtown. If the aesthetics of parking meters is a concern, a pay-by-cell solution may be helpful.

APPROVE A STANDING PARKING COMMITTEE

The creation of a parking Committee is a positive step in the general management of parking as it can be of assistance to the City in monitoring the parking problems that arise and creating



buy in among stakeholders with regard to possible parking strategies and solutions. As discussed in the report, there must be representation from a variety of stakeholders. The collective of parking-informed stakeholders must serve to address the concerns of a cross section of the public. As such, a mechanism to allow all stakeholders an opportunity to voice their opinions should be considered.

PARKING LOT STANDARD LAYOUT AND STRIPING RECOMMENDATION

A substantive review of the parking stall striping practices in Los Altos would require a more substantial review of the parking layouts in the parking plazas and potentially a site visit, which is currently beyond the scope of this engagement. It is possible that more efficient parking layouts may result in an increase in parking supply. Opportunities to increase the parking supply through more efficient striping should be taken. Caution should be applied given that some efforts can be counterproductive. For example, Walker typically does not recommend installing too many compact spaces, as they may go unused or lead to misuse (misparking) of spaces, in which one vehicle effectively occupies two spaces, defeating the purpose of creating more spaces. In our experience, restriping may yield a small number of additional parking spaces though usually not a significant number. Care must then be taken so that these spaces serve the intended users.

Parking dimensions are often evaluated on a level of service (LOS) basis. It is more convenient and comfortable for a driver to park in a wider stall than a narrower stall, but narrower stalls are used, within reason, to maximize the number of spaces and therefore the efficiency of a given parcel. The width of a stall must always be considered in the context of the stall angle and the entire parking module (the dimensions of which include the drive aisle and parking spaces on each side). While each project is different, Walker typically uses the following parking stall width dimensions, which demonstrate the different stall widths and associated level of service, as a rule of thumb.

Table 1: Walker Recommended Stall Width Dimensions

Table 3-6. Recommended Stall Width Dimensions

North America	LOS D	LOS C	LOS B	LOS A
Stall Width	8'-3"	8'-6"	8'-9"	9'-0"
Angle of Park	Module (ft.)			
40	46.50	47.50	48.50	49.50
50	48.25	49.25	50.25	51.25
55	49.50	50.50	51.50	52.50
60	51.00	52.00	53.00	54.00
65	52.25	53.25	54.25	55.25
70	53.50	54.50	55.50	56.50
75	54.50	55.50	56.50	57.50
90	58.50	59.50	60.50	61.50

Source: Anthony P. Chrest, Mary Smith, Sam Bhuyan, et al., *Parking Structures*, 3rd ed., (2007), p. 37.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Overall, the methodology and analysis contained in the report and subcommittee reports are rational and thoughtful. In addition to the sections covered in this memo, it would be productive for the City to further explore the following:

- On-Street Parking
 - What is state of on-street parking conditions during the peak, on weekdays and weekends?
 - Who are the parking user groups utilizing these spaces, customers, business owners, employees, delivery drivers or others?

- Peak Parking Demand
 - What time does peak parking demand occur on a typical weekday, as well as, on a typical weekend?
 - What is the overall parking occupancy rate for Downtown on these typical days?
 - Is the peak hour the only time when parking availability is a problem, or is parking availability an issue throughout the entire day?
 - Is parking availability a problem within one parking plaza k or all of them and when do these issues occur?
 - Is there parking availability in peripheral locations, private parking areas or other locations that may present opportunities or challenges?

- Paid Parking (Smart Meters)
 - Do the benefits of this policy outweigh concerns? Is there political will to implement this solution?
 - Conduct a survey, to gather the public's reception of paid parking; is the lack of parking availability more of a concern than a small fee to park?
 - Is there a willingness to pay to ensure that a parking space is usually available near their destination?

- Turnover of parking spaces
 - A License Plate Inventory study to determine how long cars are actually staying and how often spaces are turning over and where?

- Shared Parking Agreements
 - Are there any shared parking agreements with private parking owners in place now?
 - Are the mechanisms in place in the code to allow for such arrangements?
 - Is revenue available to pay for the use of private spaces by the public?