

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION RE: REVIEW OF PARKING PRINCIPLES AND INITIATIVES

MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, CONFERENCE ROOM A
DATE: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2017

PORTSMOUTH, NH
TIME: 5:30PM

City Council Present: Mayor Blalock, Assistant Mayor Splaine, Councilors Perkins, Dwyer, Lown, Pearson, Spear and Cyr

City Council Absent: Councilor Denton

Staff Present: Nancy Colbert Puff, Acting City Manager; Juliet Walker, Planning Director; Ben Fletcher, Parking Director

Mayor Blalock called the work session to order at 5:30 p.m.

Acting City Manager Colbert Puff stated at the end of Spring the City Council requested that a Work Session be held regarding Parking but was pushed back due to personnel changes in the Parking Division.

Parking Director Ben Fletcher gave a brief review of his background and experience and stated he was interested in this position due to the holistic approach. He explained that they try to achieve a price model of 85% occupancy but are currently at 95% downtown and the high 80's just outside of downtown so he feels that the models need to be revisited. He then gave a brief power point presentation.

Slide 1 – 2012 Parking Principles were adopted by the City Council in March 2012 with some of the following items:

- A balanced mix of retail/restaurant, office and residential uses is key to downtown vitality
- A downtown parking supply that is convenient, viable and central to downtown destinations is key to the short-term and long-term health of the City's Retail, restaurant and office economies
- Increase parking supply in the downtown core
- Optimize existing resources
- Develop and enhance transportation alternatives
- Enhance wayfinding
- Price more desirable on-street space to favor motivated user groups
- Apply and enforce time limits

Slide 2 – Accomplishments - Increase Parking Supply – on September 6, 2017 the groundbreaking of the Foundry Garage was held which will result in 600 spaces. Also, there are 388 spaces as a result of public/private partnerships (Market Street Church (CCC) Lot; 299 Vaughan Lot; Rock Street Lot; Masonic Lot)

Slide 3 – Optimize Existing Resources – expanding the shuttle service to 7 days a week to accommodate employees in the downtown

Planning Director Walker explained how the program has evolved since 2014 when it began stating that it usually has peak ridership during special events such as the Halloween Parade, First Night, etc. She further reviewed the cost of the program over the years stating that it has fluctuated as there was security and marketing costs involved at the beginning.

Councilor Dwyer asked if there are subsidies available and is there an industry ratio of cost per rider. Parking Director Fletcher stated he will need to get back to her with that figure.

Optimize Existing Resources – Public Transit

Planning Director Walker stated they are looking at better ways to integrate public transit by providing COAST with other avenues to spread out and reach more riders.

Parking Director Fletcher discussed High Occupancy Meter Zones stating that they will be implementing credit card capable smart multi-space meters which are solar powered and use a smart phone app which is tied to different zones. He stated that the trial period with Passport has completed at the Bridge and Worth Lots and the city will continue with this technology. He stated we will also be able to send out messages.

Slide 4 – Smarking – Real Time Data

Smarking allows us to analyze multiple data streams with real time data to make informed decisions regarding different events, areas, etc.

Slide 5 – Develop and Enhance Alternatives

Planning Director Walker stated that this includes the Bike and Pedestrian Plan implementation and encouraging the “Park Once” philosophy to park near destinations one time. She continued that this helps manage parking supply and demand and mitigate traffic. She stated we have also implemented the Zagster Bike Share program with 6 locations in the City.

Slide 6 – Wayfinding Signage

Planning Director Walker stated that this program will help clearly define City Parking Lots and various city services and attractions and will extend outside of downtown once phase 1 is completed.

Slide 7 – Enhance Wayfinding: Providing Options – Pre-Arrival Technology

Parking Director Fletcher stated that there is a parking map available of available parking lots in the city which moving forward will be integrated with a destination tourism website. He stated it will also provide weather conditions, event specific traffic routing, and help reduce multiple trips through town looking for parking.

Slide 8 – Price Structures and Time Limits –

Parking Director Fletcher stated that currently there is a \$2.00 an hour flat rate with a 3 hour time limit and explained that other places have good luck with encouraging movement of vehicles and having different price points for “stay and pay”. He stated that they are looking at changing our ordinance to require people have to move their cars at least 500’ from previous location. He continued that they are looking at exploring development of a Citation fine structure that encourages desired behavior.

Slide 9 – Neighborhood Parking Program (NPP)

- Manage/Control Non-Resident Parking through permitting
- Introduce and application process
- Utilize RFID Technology

Parking Director Fletcher stated this will help protect parking spaces for residents and enhance quality of life.

Slide 10 – Introduce Technology

- Pay by Phone Pilot is complete
- Enforcement Technology Upgrade in Progress
- Review of McGann Revenue Control System at High Hanover Garage is in progress/better technology is now available

Parking Director Fletcher concluded by summarizing the Ongoing Strategies:

- Update Needs Projections (commission a follow-up to 2012 study)
- Develop a multi-tiered “Drive Less” program, encouraging citizens and visitors to use right-priced (or subsidized) alternatives to personal vehicles
- Modernize pricing structure
- Modernize fee structure to parking violators
- Enhance downtown Parking Shuttle for Employees
- Explore Improved Access to Downtown Residents
- Promote and advance Zagster Bike Share Program
- Explore options for on-demand Shuttle System
- Offer Attractive Pricing at Perimeter Locations
- Encourage Walking and Bicycling
- Explore updates to High Occupancy Meters (HOM) Zones
- Develop Resident Parking Program

Mayor Blalock opened the floor for discussion.

Councilor Spear asked if we will be good on parking capacity once the new parking garage is completed.

Councilor Dwyer stated she has already notices the effective of privatization/monetization of private lots and feels it is confusing. She stated there is no control of the pricing and wonders if the City of Portsmouth has received any data regarding usage, pricing, etc. and if it is changing the parking downtown.

Parking Director Fletcher stated he has spoken to Joey Giordano who has indicated he will share current data but not previous information. Secondly, he stated that if it was free parking before and is now being charged or costs more than previously, then it will actually put more people into the city’s parking spaces.

Councilor Dwyer stated she uses the shuttle service more often and feels that a study will help. She continued that she feels the views of parking are changing as the newer generation doesn’t want cars anymore.

Councilor Perkins asked if there will be a discount to employees and residents in the parking garages.

Parking Director Fletcher stated that anything is in play and will be using the supply/demand model and can offer discounts to park in the new garage etc.

Mayor Blalock stated he would like to see employee parking in the near future as they need options for less expensive spaces. He stated they do not need to be in the middle of downtown and gave the Isles of Shoals lot as an example of utilizing other spaces.

Councilor Cyr stated he is glad to be talking about employees and having the shuttle provide the service to them during peak periods. He then stated he is concerned with the commercial space downtown which is not being rented out specifically near the Worth Lot because the Worth Lot isn't available to employees and they can't be guaranteed spaces in the High Hanover garage. He stated in other cities large corporations will pay for shuttles and suggested reaching out to companies.

Councilor Pearson stated that the residential parking and employee parking are closely related because employees are parking in the residential neighborhoods where there is sometimes only on-street parking available to some residents. She asked if the research on this is available.

Planning Director Walker stated it is not done yet and feels it is important to look at other models, although Portsmouth is unique.

Councilor Pearson stated that going forward she would like to see the residents of the affected neighborhoods involved because they have great ideas.

Acting City Manager Colbert Puff stated that Parking Director Fletcher and Planning Director Walker both have the expertise and new ideas.

Councilor Cyr stated that a residential parking program already exists on Hanover Street but it is not enforced. He stated there have already been multiple public hearings, committee meetings, etc. and there is information already available. He stated that it was determined that different neighborhoods expected different things.

Mayor Blalock clarified that there are 2 different residential issues; reduced rates for Portsmouth residents and secondly, residential parking in front of their homes.

Planning Director Walker suggested calling the latter "Neighborhood Parking" to differentiate the 2 issues.

Councilor Cyr stated he is also concerned with modernizing the pricing structure stating that we have a lot of demand because there are no other options, but if we adjust the prices, it will allow on the "haves" to be able to park.

Councilor Spear stated as a counter argument to that point, it would increase the incentive to use alternatives such as COAST, Park and Ride, carpooling, etc.

Councilor Lown stated that Councilor Cyr raises a good point that demand based parking doesn't work if there are no viable alternatives. He stated there are alternatives, but they are not viable and will only allow those who can afford to park. He stated that is the crux of the debate, how high does it have to be raised to really affect peoples' behavior.

Discussion ensued regarding COAST bus services and their ability to expand services and the issues that they are facing at this time.

Councilor Perkins stated she agrees with the crux and feels that over time things will change, but we want to be able to give people choices and the goal isn't to force people to make a miserable choice.

Councilor Cyr stated he wanted to clarify his point that the viable alternative would be to live, work and play elsewhere. He stated this should be done hand in hand with residential/employee options as the point isn't to raise revenue but to shift parking.

Mayor Blalock stated that we started with the 2012 Parking Study and so where are we now. He stated that once the new garage is done, then the renovations will begin to the High Hanover garage and all of these steps will help alleviate congestion and provide more available stock. He stated we don't want companies not to be able to locate here because there is no employee parking. He stated that this is being done in phases but in 4 years we will have 600 real spaces which will help.

Councilor Lown stated he wanted to address a different issue relating to the private parking lots where they make deals with private property owners to use the spaces at night and make a profit. He stated on Court Street there is a 50-70 space lot being used that the neighbors are not happy with and he wonders if it is allowed based on the zoning for that area.

Planning Director Walker stated the department has been looking into this and if it is reasonable to have parking at night in a mixed residential area. She stated that this is creeping away from the original intention of the downtown area.

Assistant Mayor Splaine discussed the issue of parking in residential neighborhoods stating this has been an ongoing issue for many years. He stated there have been many neighborhood meetings over the years and the neighbors have good ideas. He stated that city government works slowly and is afraid that the 2028 Council will still be working on this and would like to address it now.

Councilor Dwyer asked why people who do have driveways don't use them. She stated that we also need a walk-more drive-less culture and need to look at zoning requirements for parking.

Mayor Blalock stated he agrees with Assistant Mayor Splaine about the residential parking issue but feels we also need to address employee parking as well as enforcement of the parking ordinance.

Councilor Spear stated he thinks it would be helpful to list on the parking kiosks to educate people what the parking revenue actually goes towards. He also addressed the issue of requiring people moving their cars 500' every few hours and feels that there should be a stay and pay alternative.

Parking Director Fletcher stated that an open space is a car that just left.

Councilor Spear stated that turnover is one way to address it, but pricing is another.

Discussion concluded that the Acting City Manager was requested to come back with a report for neighborhood parking program.

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie A. French
Deputy City Clerk