

**MINUTES**

**PLANNING BOARD  
WORK SESSION  
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**CITY HALL, MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE**

**7:00 P.M.**

**MARCH 22, 2012**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Ricci, Chairman; Paige Roberts, Vice Chairman; Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, City Council Representative; John Rice; Cindy Hayden, Deputy City Manager; Richard Hopley, Building Inspector; William Gladhill;

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Anthony Blenkinsop; MaryLiz Geffert; and Brian Groth, Alternate

**ALSO PRESENT:** Rick Taintor, Planning Director

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**I. WORK SESSION**

Chairman Ricci called the meeting to order and turned it over to Deputy City Manager Hayden

**A. Zoning Amendments for Downtown Parking**

Deputy City Manager Hayden started by giving a presentation on the “big picture” that the City Council and multiple other Boards will be looking at over the next few months. Parking downtown has been a big issue under discussion by a lot of different Boards and the Council for quite a while and it appears that it is time to move ahead. They had Nelson\Nygaard do the study of supply and parking demand downtown.

Deputy City Manager Hayden explained the omnibus process, showing the timeframe of City review. It started with the City Council work session on March 12<sup>th</sup> where guiding parking principles were discussed and at their March 19<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting they adopted those guiding parking principles. Planning staff will work with the Planning Board on parking requirements downtown and the payment in lieu fee. At the same time, the EDC and Parking and Traffic Safety Committee will discuss issues such as pricing, supply and garage issues. All of that information will go to the City Council and they will schedule a Work Session to discuss all of the draft recommendations. The intent is to have a Parking Omnibus including all issues and it will go through three readings at City Council. Parallel to that will be the bonding for the parking garage, if that is one of the recommendations that come out of this process.

Deputy City Manager Hayden introduced the guiding principles by making the distinction between parking supply and parking management principles. Supply principles address whether there is enough parking or if we need to build more, vs. management principles which are about optimizing what we have, such as through changes in on-street time limits, prices or wayfinding. It is important to have a mix of uses downtown and in order to have that healthy vital downtown they need a convenient supply

of parking that is easy to get to. There are 17 guiding parking principles and, for this Board, the first two principles are the most important because they are about the zoning changes.

1. Parking for the non-residential downtown users is a City responsibility.
2. Parking for downtown residences is primarily a private responsibility with residents wanting convenient parking right where they live.
3. We need to plan for future uses, redevelopment and full occupancy of buildings in the CBB. If it is too difficult, expensive or unpleasant to find parking, people may prefer to go elsewhere.
4. The city should strive to play a lead role in developing and managing parking facilities
  - Parking management and supply decision are interconnected and a comprehensive, unified approach to decision making is needed.
  - While the value of private parking facilities is very important, it is not within the City's control and not something longterm that they can count on.
5. We need to manage parking to address peak periods when people can't find parking (for example, through special pricing).
6. The parking garage should support economic development as well as residents and it should be priced and managed to improve utilization.
7. Pricing should be simple and easy for customers.
8. There is a difference between people running into town for a quick errand and long term parkers who work or visit for the day.
9. Pricing and managing the more desirable street parking spaces to favor users who are highly motivated to use them.
10. Make information on parking option easy to use and use technology to get that information out to people.
11. They should take a big picture approach to parking planning in all decision making.
12. All parking resources should be concerned about aesthetics, security, accessibility and user information which is easy to understand.
13. Encourage public transit and other transportation modes, but also recognizing that people like to use their cars.
14. The principle that the City Council adopted was that the surface parking lot should be at the periphery of the downtown rather than being spaces along the streets creating "dead zones".
15. They should give incentives to residents for using the garage.
16. Parking resources should be provided to support downtown activity (streets are for people as well as cars) and should therefore be designed and located in such a manner that recognizes the following:
  - Parking resources should enhance, rather than detract, from downtown vitality.
  - Parking resources should accommodate pedestrians (bump-outs, plazas), bicycles (bike parking) and transit (space to pull over).
  - Parking structures should be incorporated into the commercial streetscape.
  - The needs of an aging population should be taken into account when it comes to parking.
17. Parking strategies should be revenue neutral.

Deputy City Manager Hayden stated the Rick Taintor would review the highlights of the Nelson\Nygaard report which was just looking at supply and demand downtown. They counted parking spaces, and cars, and they gave the City data. The City now needs to determine what to do with that data.

Mr. Taintor confirmed that they engaged Nelson\Nygaard to look at parking supply (the number of on-street and off-street parking spaces), and occupancy (the number of spaces occupied by cars at various times of the day), in a large area around the downtown. The total study area was larger than the actual downtown to get an idea of the spillover from the downtown, into neighborhoods. There are also some significant facilities like the Parrott Avenue and South Mill lot which are outside of the Downtown Overlay District (DOD). Nelson\Nygaard also defined an area that is within a five minute walk from Market Square. They looked at each set of on-street parking spaces and each off-street parking lot, public and private, and determined what percentage of occupancy they were at various times of the day. They mapped out the occupancy by less than 60% occupied (grey), 60% - 80% (blue), 80% - 90% (green), over 90% (pink) and over 100% (red). With pay and display meters, someone can leave before their time has expired and someone immediately pulls in and buys that time for a second time. The maps also show areas (outlined in red dotted lines) where there is quite a bit of pressure at a particular time.

This study was done in October, which is not peak parking for the City. They start on a weekday at noon and it shows that in the core of downtown all on street spaces are over 100% capacity and the Parrott Avenue lot is close to 100%. Even some of the on-street spaces around the periphery of the downtown are full.

Moving later into the day, the boundary of the intensely used spaces expands to include the entire area within a five-minute walk from Market Square, except for the parking garage which stays at a low level of occupancy at that point and other areas outside the downtown which become more stressed. Looking at Saturday daytime the entire downtown area, including the lot, is packed and Saturday evening is even more full.

A key finding, looking at the on-street and off-street spaces, and the 5 minute walk from downtown, shows that the utilization of on-street spaces increases throughout the day, up to 85%. The off-street spaces stay relatively open during the day. It is important to note that 35% of the off street parking spaces are private so this doesn't truly give a sense of how many spaces are available to the general public.

They mapped the private parking lots (blue) and the public parking lots (green). Private parking lots represent 62% of all off-street parking in the entire study area and 35% of off-street spaces in a 5 minute walk from Market Square.

A chart was prepared, showing the utilization of City off-street parking facilities. They were sorted by the size of the facility. The parking garage was the largest one and the second largest was the Portwalk lot which will disappear in the fall. On a weekday at noon the Parrott Avenue lot is full, there is space in the garage, space at Portwalk and, surprisingly, there was space at the Worth Lot. In the evening, the empty spaces are further away from the downtown.

Nelson\Nygaard also looked at the land uses in the buildings and came up with an estimated parking demand based on typical downtown shared parking characteristics. Those uses change during the day and during the evening there is a much higher demand in Portsmouth than is typical for a downtown.

That reflects the overlap of uses, with the restaurants coming in, the workers leaving for the day and residents coming home. The chart shows the total capacity of parking spaces and the 85% level, which is the ideal capacity. In October, non-peak season, our estimated excess capacity is 270 parking spaces. Taking these numbers, and add in all of vacant office space as well as future projects that are in the works, the excess capacity shrinks to 108 spaces, which is practically nothing.

They showed the difference between peak and off peak months and during the summer months they exceed capacity. They showed Pay & Display ticket sales which also exceed capacity in the summer months.

They tried to project the comparison between October and July/August and under existing conditions they project with no growth in the downtown the excess capacity will drop to 137 spaces. This shows that we are running out of parking spaces and we don't have a lot of capacity for growth.

This is the direction that the City Council is going, by discussing increasing supply, discussing pricing strategies, to better manage supply. The part that the Planning Board plays is the regulatory changes. We have talked about this on numerous occasions on how we address parking in our zoning. With some recent situations with small businesses having to pay an in lieu fee for parking, it has become very problematic and they continue to think that the process they have now is not working well. It is difficult to explain to someone. Therefore, we are now recommending something that we have talked about in the past which is to eliminate the difference between restaurants and other non-residential uses and, as was stated in the parking principles, the City is responsible for providing parking spaces for the office, restaurant, retail, non-residential uses and the private sector should be responsible for providing parking spaces to serve the residences.

They currently require one parking space for every 100 s.f. of restaurant space and they are proposing that be eliminated. There is no change for other ground floor uses. They currently require one space for every 1,000 s.f. for upper floor uses and they are proposing to eliminate that requirement for non-residential uses and to go back to the residential general multi-family requirement of 1 ½ spaces per dwelling unit. Those are big changes and the really big change is to eliminate the payment in lieu. They currently have \$2,200 per space and that is less than 1/10 the cost of a public parking space. They are basically saying that residential should provide their parking on site as new development occurs. They feel this will be much easier to understand.

Mr. Taintor asked for feedback from the Board.

Mr. Rice felt that this was pretty obvious. One principle for restaurants and office users is that they are primarily a City responsibility so the fee should be eliminated. Mr. Taintor indicated that although it supports the principle they want to make sure the Board thinks this will work. Mr. Rice felt this drives them towards building a parking garage, although he understands they are not here to discuss that. Chairman Ricci felt that it is important that rather than having little pod parking spaces popping up everywhere, he would like to see one municipal controlled parking garage. That leaves the other space to be developed as parks or offices for revitalization. He felt the revenue that developers will ultimately save will go back into filling storefronts and building new buildings and generating revenue for the City.

Deputy City Manager Hayden indicated that the whole reason they are doing this is that it needs to be comprehensive. The City Council needs to hear from the Planning Board that this is how they want to head. The City Council will look at everything comprehensively and then proceed. What is important

is that what they have been doing hasn't been working. There are very few places where people can build on-site parking so they end up with projects that really should have parking on their residential site but because it is so much cheaper for developers to buy their way out, they can. Then people buy the units and they are mad at the City because they don't have parking. They have not been generating a lot of revenue because the fee is so small.

Councilor Novelline Clayburgh did not think it was fair that the restaurants were the only ones that had to pay so she likes this.

Mr. Gladhill asked what the reasoning was for 1.5 space per dwelling unit was and why not base it on the number of bedrooms. Mr. Taintor explained that is what they have in their multifamily regulations in other parts of the City and they also didn't want to get into regulating what rooms are actually used for and which rooms are actually bedrooms. They tried to make it simple.

Chairman Ricci felt this is simple, long overdue and is the way to proceed.

Mr. Rice stated that from a value standpoint, if they are not leaning on residential developers to provide parking they will have units with no parking and sales will plummet.

Councilor Novelline Clayburgh assumed this doesn't prevent a developer from using garage parking. Mr. Taintor explained that they could not do that and they would be required to provide the parking spaces on-site. It exempts the first four parking spaces so if there is a very small single or two family house on the edge of downtown they would not be forced to provide those parking spaces. For example, the Bridge Street development which is before them would have a problem because they are maximizing the building on site. They would have to reduce the size of the building in order to provide space for parking, or go underground. And, there is always the BOA for a variance. Chairman Ricci indicated they can always change the use of the building. They would not be telling a developer what to do but sometimes you have to tell them what they can't do.

Deputy City Manager Hayden stated they we are always looking for an interesting mix of residential and non residential in the downtown and they could make the argument that residential has not been paying it's full freight if they are not providing parking on site and have been depending on the public sector to provide that parking. They may build a more mixed use building if they can't build the residential on site. Chairman Ricci felt that once you go residential it's hard to go back.

Ms. Roberts felt this makes good sense and she doesn't have a lot of comments. She wonders about any unintended consequences. She is thinking of a few times on the HDC where they were faced with building where they wanted to put parking on the ground level. Mr. Taintor explained that in the Downtown Overlay District there is a prohibition against ground floor residential and parking spaces must be a certain distance from the street. They are looking to potentially expand the Downtown Overlay District and they would need to make sure that those areas would also benefit from these rules. They will be coming back with a proposal for that.

Chairman Ricci felt that, in general, everyone appears to be in support of these changes.

Mr. Taintor indicated that there is a joint work session of the EDC and Parking and Traffic Safety on April 6th and after that staff will regroup and they will bring the Planning Board consensus back to the City Manager and then schedule in April formal consideration of this change.

Deputy City Manager Hayden indicated that, if the Planning Board makes that recommendation to the Council, the Council will hold on to the Planning Board piece as they put the rest of the puzzle together to put the entire omnibus together.

Chairman Ricci reminded the Board of Monday night's Work Session with the City Council, HDC and EDC and the following month they will go over their comments about the meeting to provide to the Mayor.

Councilor Novelline Clayburgh asked if they will talk about a parking garage at some point. Chairman Ricci stated that is a City Council issue. Deputy City Manager Hayden felt that when they pass on to the City Council their Zoning Ordinance changes, they may want to add some of the Planning Board principles such as why the Planning Board believes that the system in place hasn't been working and explain why we feel that way. Chairman Ricci also felt they could attend that City Council meeting to answer any questions and make their presence known.

**II. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn at 8:15pm was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

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Respectfully submitted,

Jane M. Shouse  
Acting Secretary for the Planning Board

These minutes were approved by the Planning Board on May 17, 2012.