



DISCUSS DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT CLOSURE

Requested Action: Staff seeks direction on how to proceed.

Possible options for moving forward:

1. Leave the entrance closed
2. Reopen the entrance
3. Increase the number of accessible parking spaces
4. Install speed bumps
5. Two of the above or another option

If the entrance remains closed, staff would move forward with the additional parking spaces along S. Main. DOT has confirmed they would allow more on-street parking.

SUMMARY

REVIEW:

Last month, the entrance to the downtown parking lot off S. Main Street (between the Broad River Greenway office and the Talk of the Town salon) was closed about 1 week after the Council meeting (4/10/23, about 3:45pm). Public Works employees placed cones and barricades in the area to make the entrance closure highly visible to travelers on S. Main.

**Accessible parking is the accepted term by the ADA to describe 'handicapped parking'*

FEEDBACK RECEIVED:

The Town Manager spoke with the owners of Talk of the Town salon, Snack Shop, and Turner Trucking before the closure. Ms. Creswell said she was open to trying it, Mr. Tsambounieris said he didn't 'think it was a great idea, but thought it would impact the salon more than him,' and Mr. Turner said he was 'worried about the children at Pelican's and access during an emergency.'

We heard from the salon a week or two later that it was inconveniencing their customers and Ms. Creswell stated it was "killing them." She also expressed concerns about the EV charging stations that were recently installed. Mr. Tsambounieris reiterated his same comments from before. In both instances, business owners expressed concerns about parking for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, Mr. Turner felt even with the closure that speed bumps needed to be installed.

We spoke to one of the employees at Pelican's who is related to the owner. She said she was "confused at first about why it was closed, but has realized that it's creating a safer area for their customers and will continue to provide a safer space as they grow."



Other citizens vocalized support to the staff of the closure stating that it “felt safer, with less traffic” when they visited Pelican’s with their children. As a reminder for Council’s consideration, Turner Trucking owns from about the alleyway over to Town Commons Drive. The Town owns from the alleyway to S. Main St.

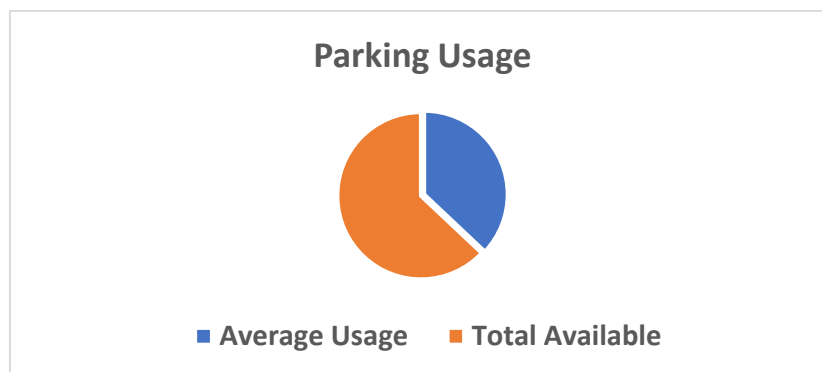
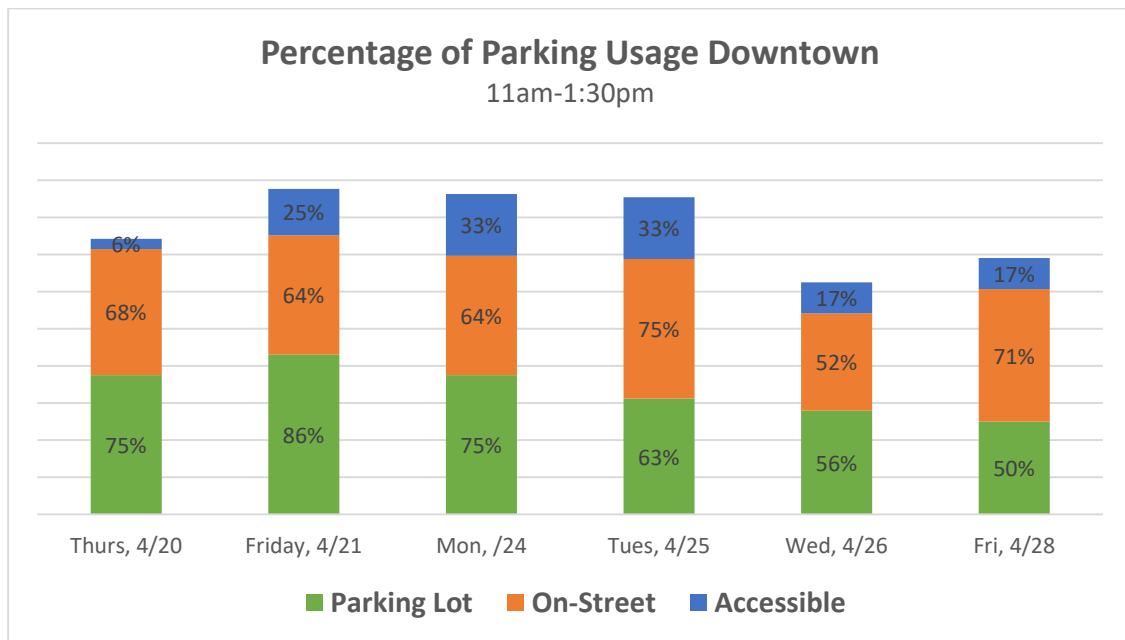
We posted about the closure on April 18th on Facebook. The post had 34,698 impressions, reached 33,708 people, and had 2,810 engagements. It also had 39 shares and 23 comments. Some of the comments included:

- “We were doing this 30 years ago to avoid that light.”
- “I think it’s dangerous to have tables and chairs in the parking places, parking places are needed.”
- “Will signage be added to Town Commons Drive...”
 - *Signage was added on E. College and at the intersection of Town Commons and the parking lot. We would plan to place more permanent signage if the entrance stayed closed.*
- There were a couple of comments about moving the barricade to the “middle” (closer to where the alleyway is).
- There were a couple of comments about having to turn around in the parking lot and not being able to exit on Main St.
- There were other comments about keeping it closed, closing the other end, speed bumps, and some others.
- Additionally in the post, we attempted to promote parking at Town Hall as an option for anyone.

STAFF ACTION:

After hearing this range of feedback from business owners, residents, and Facebook, staff evaluated the usage of the parking lot on an almost daily basis starting on April 20th. We found on *average*, during peak times (11am-1:30pm), that 1 out of 6 accessible spaces were used, 18 out of 28 regular spaces were used, and 9 out of 14 on-street parking spaces were used. These numbers varied, but out of the 6 days recorded, the highest usage was 75% for on-street and parking lot spaces (one exception is Webbstock, which increased usage to 86% for ‘regular’ spaces). A graph of these findings is below.

Additionally, an estimated 25% of vehicles were used by employees of the downtown businesses. These were observed through vehicles seen on a regular basis and by seeing employees leave vehicles and enter rear business entrances. Approximately 3 vehicles were seen pulling into, turning around, and then leaving the parking lot without issue.



SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION:

The goal of the closure was to increase safety in the area. This entrance being closed eliminates some traffic, slows down vehicles that go into the lot, and eliminates vehicles driving across a downtown sidewalk. There is ample room to turn around and maneuver back out of the parking lot. Staff's evaluation of the feedback and data collected is that the parking lot closure has been an inconvenience



for people, but it has also accomplished the goal of increased safety. We also conclude that general parking availability is a non-issue.

Staff recommends keeping the entrance closed, adding on-street parking on S. Main, and adding additional accessible parking spaces in the Town lot. We also recommend encouraging the use of parking at Town Hall for employees of the downtown businesses.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

On a related note, we have been pursuing a grant for work on the courtyard area that has been planned as part of the streetscape project. A rendering and aerial are included. This layout would rearrange the parking but would only subtract 1 parking spot.

MATERIALS PROVIDED

- **Rendering of Courtyard**
- **Aerial of Parking Lot**