



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: November 12, 2024

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Subject: Study Session for the Draft Downtown Parking Strategy

COUNCIL PRIORITY AREA

- Business Communities
- Circulation Safety and Efficiency
- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Neighborhood Safety Infrastructure
- General Government

RECOMMENDATION

Review and provide feedback on the Draft Downtown Parking Strategy.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Not applicable.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

None.

BACKGROUND

The City Council authorized the retention of W-Trans traffic engineering consultants in September 2023 to prepare a Downtown Parking Strategy (“Strategy”) which is included as part of Program 3.A within the adopted Sixth Cycle Housing Element 2023-203. The Housing Element requires the City to complete this program by December 31, 2024.

The Strategy represents the City’s efforts to address current and future parking challenges within the Downtown area specifically and builds on other recent and ongoing downtown plans and studies. The existing parking conditions in Downtown are documented, including an inventory of the parking supply and demand through a parking occupancy and turnover study of public and private on- and off-street parking facilities. The results of this parking survey provide data to support analysis of actual parking patterns, rather than perceptions of parking patterns, and to establish key parking trends.

Based on key findings from the parking occupancy and turnover study, economic feasibility assessment, and community outreach, the report includes a set of strategies designed to increase the publicly available parking supply, better manage demand, adjust parking policies in anticipation of new development, and finance components of the parking program. The recommendations from this plan are intended to proactively address existing and future parking challenges in a way that supports the continued success of Downtown Los Altos and supports future change envisioned in the City’s policy documents, including the Downtown Vision Plan and Housing Element. Information from past studies and policy documents were reviewed and considered in preparation of the Strategy including the numerous Downtown parking studies prepared over the years.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Existing Conditions

The Strategy started with a survey of the existing conditions in the study area which is defined as the triangular area bounded by Foothill Expressway, South San Antonio Road, and West Edith Avenue. A map of the study area is shown in Figure 1.

The parking inventory was determined through field observations on three days in December 2023 (weekday and weekend days), including counting all on-street parking spaces and spaces in public parking lots and private parking lots that are publicly accessible (i.e., not gated or closed for construction) and noting any parking restrictions. Parking turnover data in the study area was also collected for all on-street spaces as well as all public off-street parking facilities.



Figure 1 – Study Area Map

Based on the parking inventory, it was found the current vehicle parking supply within Downtown consists of:

395 on-street spaces
804 private off-street spaces
1,305 public off-street spaces
Total: 2,504 spaces

Most on-street spaces (60 percent) have two-hour time limits and most public off-street spaces (79 percent) have three-hour time limits. On the days and hours surveyed, the overall study area generally has a substantial supply of vacant parking available. Peak parking space occupancy rates within Downtown ranged between 54 and 60 percent. Peak occupancy for public spaces (up to 71 percent) was significantly higher than for private off-street spaces (up to 38 percent). The lowest peak occupancy at private off-street lots (26 percent) was recorded on a Saturday when several offices with dedicated lots were closed.

According to parking turnover data, most vehicles were parked for fewer than two hours and relatively few vehicles were parked long term. Despite the few drivers parking long-term, long-term vehicles made up a disproportionate number of the total hours in which vehicles occupied parking spaces (i.e. the vehicles that were parked long-term were parking for many hours).

Economic Feasibility Assessment

As part of the development of the parking strategies, W-Trans worked with Strategic Economics on an Economic and Financial Feasibility Assessment focused on ensuring that the recommended strategies and /or future policies support the financial feasibility of future housing development in Downtown. The assessment included reviews of recent housing market and feasibility studies conducted for Los Altos and nearby cities, and interviews with developers of market-rate and affordable housing who are active in Los Altos and nearby communities. The Economic and Financial Feasibility Assessment is included in the draft document and was used to inform potential strategies.

Public Outreach and Feedback

From February through April of 2024, community feedback regarding parking in Downtown Los Altos was collected via stakeholder meetings with community stakeholders (e.g. LAVA, Chamber of Commerce, etc.), a virtual community workshop, an in-person community workshop at the Los Altos Community Center, a pop-up community meeting at the Veterans Community Plaza, an online questionnaire, and dedicated City webpage. Summaries of the feedback received at these meetings are included in the draft document and were used to inform potential strategies.

Parking Management Plan Strategies

While community feedback and occupancy data indicate that parking in Downtown currently functions well, planned development and replacement of the off-street parking plazas could result in changes in overall parking demand and supply and necessitate a plan for how parking is managed in the future. Presently, the highest parking occupancy occurs during the midday (12 pm) and in the Downtown Core (along State Street and Main Street, as well as within a block of State and Main Streets on Second and Third Streets). Occupancy data indicates that there is appreciably less utilization in private lots than in public on-street spaces and lots.

In the short term, this presents an opportunity to make some existing private spaces publicly available through shared parking agreements managed by a Downtown Transportation Management Association (TMA) a component of a Business Improvement District (BID). In the mid-term, on-street parking meters, enhanced enforcement through technological or personnel upgrades, and revisions to the existing “White Dot” employee parking program (among other strategies) could allow the City to manage the increase in parking demand associated with growth in the Downtown. Additional strategies to improve the experience of residents, employees, and visitors to Downtown are recommended such as enhanced bicycle parking, online mobility information and visitor permits, parking wayfinding signage, and safety improvements for future underground or structured facilities.

Included in the report is a diverse range of strategies to address the parking challenges as well as adjustments in policies in anticipation of new development and finance components of the parking program. These strategies were informed by feedback from community members, developers, and other stakeholders. The recommended strategies are divided into two phases. The first, “short-

term,” phase includes strategies prioritized for the next two years and the second, “mid-term,” phase includes strategies planned two to five years in the future. Strategies from both phases are summarized below, with each strategy explained in greater detail in the attached Draft Parking Strategy.

Short-Term Actions (0–2 Years)

- **Short-Term Action 1** - Create a Business Improvement District (BID) for Downtown Los Altos that includes a Transportation Management Association (TMA) as a component of the BID. Establish the area bounded by Foothill Expressway, South San Antonio Road, and West Edith Avenue as a Parking Benefit District (PBD).
- **Short-Term Action 2** - Direct the TMA to pursue shared parking agreements with private off-street lot owners. Require that developments that remove Downtown parking plazas replace the parking spaces lost.
- **Short-Term Action 3** - Set the annual cost of a parklet equal to the value of the on-street parking space(s) to be replaced.
- **Short-Term Action 4** - Provide online mobility information for visitors, employees, and residents traveling to/from Downtown.
- **Short-Term Action 5** - Amend the City’s Zoning Code to make all Downtown a single Parking District. Within the Downtown Parking District, institute a parking in-lieu fee.
- **Short-Term Action 6** - Develop secure long-term bicycle parking facilities Downtown and follow design standards with short-term bicycle racks.

Mid-Term Actions (2-5 years)

- **Mid-Term Action 1** - Replace the “Yellow Book” customer parking permits with online, all-day visitor parking permits.
- **Mid-Term Action 2** - Relocate “White Dot” Employee Parking Permit (EPP) spaces to shared parking facilities and underground parking garages as they become available.
- **Mid-Term Action 3** - Install parking meters for on-street spaces in the Downtown Core with graduated meter rates and return revenues to Downtown via the PBD.
- **Mid-Term Action 4** - Should enforcement in Downtown be needed, enhance parking enforcement through Automatic License Plate Recognition (ALPR) and/or contracting enforcement to an outside company.
- **Mid-Term Action 5** - Increase the perceived safety of underground parking structures Downtown, if constructed, through strategies such as emergency blue light phones, camera systems, enhanced lighting, and signage.

- **Mid-Term Action 6** - Install wayfinding signage throughout Downtown Los Altos to direct drivers to publicly available off-street parking facilities.
- **Mid-Term Action 7** - Require that developers changing on-street vehicle parking on a road segment provide sufficient on-street accessible parking spaces per the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG).
- **Mid-Term Action 8** - Maintain public parking facilities through regular repaving and restriping. Provide additional electric vehicle charging stations in facilities.

Next Steps

After review and feedback on the draft Strategy at this Study Session, staff and the consultant will make any necessary modifications to the Strategy and return to Council for adoption early next year.

ATTACHMENT

1. Draft Downtown Parking Strategy