



TOWN OF LOS GATOS
Staff Report

MEETING DATE: 04/20/2021

ITEM NO: 15

DATE: April 5, 2021
TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Laurel Prevetti, Town Manager
SUBJECT: Direct the Advancement of the Downtown Employee Parking Pilot and the Issuance of a Request for Proposals for Consultant Services for Wayfinding Signage

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct the advancement of the Downtown Employee Parking Pilot and the issuance of a Request for Proposals for consultant services for wayfinding signage.

BACKGROUND:

On December 17, 2019 the Town Council received the Comprehensive Downtown Parking Study from Dixon Resources Unlimited (DIXON). The Parking Study identified multiple strategies for the Town to more efficiently manage parking, effectively increase the existing parking supply and improve the visitor experience.

The Town Council discussed the Parking Study strategies and prioritized wayfinding and employee parking as the key first steps to improving the downtown parking experience. In June of 2020, a part-time Parking Program Manager was hired to begin the process of implementing the Parking Roadmap priorities of wayfinding and the Employee Parking Program. Included in the Employee Parking priority was the request to explore limited employee parking in underutilized residential parking areas.

On January 26, 2021, the Town Council reaffirmed the commitment to the Parking Roadmap with the adoption of the Strategic Priorities FY 2021-2023. This was to include short, medium and long-term actions.

This staff report provides an outline of short-term actions, including a pilot Employee Parking Program.

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Traffic Sergeant and Parking Program Manager

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DISCUSSION:

There is a general perception that downtown Los Gatos does not have enough parking. The DIXON Parking Study, conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, concluded that there are sufficient parking spaces to meet the current demand, especially by leveraging underutilized parking spaces throughout downtown.

The DIXON Parking Study collected data that identified ways to manage the parking supply but did not provide specifics needed to establish an Employee Parking Program. Staff proposes a survey of the primary stakeholders (business owners and employees) to determine the number of employee spaces needed and the preferred locations to appropriately balance employee and visitor needs. The most convenient spaces would be prioritized for visitors. Survey data will be collected and analyzed over a 30-day period. Surveys would be distributed online and will also be available in printed format (see Attachment 1).

Wayfinding is a means of quickly guiding visitors to convenient vacant parking spaces. It is the single most effective way to improve the visitor parking experience and enhance vehicle traffic flow. Wayfinding will be improved in a multi-phased process. Initially, existing static signage will be evaluated and updated to eventually include more parking information. All lot signage will be standardized and additional directional signs will be added to help guide visitors into the lots. Options include adding kiosk-style parking maps and pedestrian travel information signage. Later wayfinding phases may add vehicle occupancy counting and dynamic electronic arterial roadway signs providing guidance to vacant spaces in real-time. Once real-time lot occupancy data is available, it can be exported to a mobile phone application that can also provide similar real-time parking information. The introduction of a mobile phone application is not anticipated until a later phase of the wayfinding project.

An additional wayfinding technique is branding downtown Los Gatos parking. Branding will mainly consist of creating a unique Town of Los Gatos parking logo and linking that logo to the parking website where visitors can find information on parking availability and regulations. The initial phase of branding would include a detailed parking web page that is updated on a continual basis.

The use of outside consultants is recommended for branding development and wayfinding signage evaluation. It is expected to take three to four months for the consultants to develop their recommendations. A vendor will also need to be identified to design, manufacture, and install the new signage. Concurrently, temporary signage will be developed by Parks and Public Works staff and placed for the implementation of the Employee Parking Pilot.

To improve visitor parking, employee parking will need to be controlled. Managing employee parking behaviors through an Employee Parking Pilot would allow the Town to adjust where employees park and provide convenient parking for visitors. An Employee Parking Pilot is the first step to managing the overall demand for downtown parking. An effective Employee

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DISCUSSION (continued):

Parking program would require dedicated permitted employee spaces distributed across the municipal lots and potentially underutilized residential streets.

During the Employee Parking Pilot, many of the current unlimited time spaces would need to be converted into dedicated employee spaces. The remaining unlimited time spaces would be converted into three-hour time limited spaces. All central parking lots (Lots 1 through 6) would need to have all unlimited time space eliminated, otherwise employees will continue to use them instead of participating in the Employee Parking Pilot.

The Employee Parking Pilot would be in effect for a six to 12-month period. Employees would register online for a free parking permit through the Town's existing parking vendor. During the pilot process, lot occupancy counts, and stakeholder feedback would be used to further develop the parking program to best meet the needs of the community. This may include employee parking zones and potential employee parking permit fees.

Employee Parking Permits would be virtual and based on license plate information. This allows for the use of the existing Town parking enforcement vehicle equipped with an Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR). Virtual permits are a Pay-by-Plate model that ultimately provides the most customer convenience and the most efficient enforcement method. It also has the lowest implementation and recurring operational costs. It reduces the staff hours needed to administer the permit program and eliminates permit printing and fulfillment costs. The use of an ALPR equipped vehicle allows parking enforcement staff to verify the parking status of each vehicle at a significantly higher frequency than other methods of enforcement. This consistency in enforcement creates a higher level of compliance and ultimately a lower issuance of citations.

Enforcement of Employee Permit Parking would start with outreach and education. The education process is intended to continue with a period of warnings being issued and the distribution of information on the proper protocols for employee parking. Citations would only be issued after the prior receipt of a documented warning. Patterns of non-compliance would be evaluated to determine if employees are receiving and understanding parking information. Additional outreach will occur if deficiencies are apparent.

During the pilot phase, staff intends to begin to research a mobile phone parking payment application where visitors can purchase additional time to stay beyond the three-hour free period. Pay stations and a mobile application will be ultimately necessary options for visitors who need to stay beyond the three-hour period. During the pilot phase, employees would use an online link to the Town's existing parking vendor for the Olive Area employee and residential area permits. This facilitates a "park-once" philosophy which increases convenience for visitors and employees alike and lessens unnecessary vehicle trips.

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DISCUSSION (continued):

Park-once refers to parking your vehicle and not having to move to another location because of time limit restrictions. Employees with permits would be allowed to park all day in the designated employee parking areas. Visitors could use any of the time limited spaces and pay-to-stay beyond the time limit without moving their vehicle. A re-parking prohibition may likely be required in the next phase to discourage employee use of the time limited spaces intended for visitors.

The Employee Permit Pilot would be used to determine the number and locations of employee spaces needed. If additional spaces are needed in certain areas, a limited number of employee parking permits can be issued to park in underutilized residential parking areas.

In March, the Complete Streets and Transportation Commission was provided an update on the Downtown Parking Plan to obtain feedback and received positive support.

CONCLUSION:

The DIXON Study provided a Roadmap that includes multiple phases to achieving a more satisfying parking experience for the downtown community. The initial Town Council priorities of Wayfinding and an Employee Parking Program are driving this effort. The pilot allows staff to set in motion the initial phase of relocating employee vehicles to the underutilized areas and free more spaces for visitors. This will be achieved by enhanced wayfinding signage and new parking program branding to assist the visitors in finding a convenient parking space.

Due to the pandemic, convenient parking has been abundant for the limited employees and visitors patronizing Downtown businesses and restaurants. This provides an opportunity to slowly implement the Employee Parking Pilot and observe its impact. It allows staff to gather information, train enforcement staff, and set infrastructure in place ultimately shaping the program. This timing opportunity reduces the potential for a detrimental impact on visitors.

During and at the conclusion of the pilot period, feedback and lessons learned will be used to develop and enhance the overall Downtown Parking Program.

ALTERNATIVES:

Two alternatives present themselves:

- Postpone the Employee Permit Pilot implementation until business activity returns to normal, or
- Accelerate the implementation of the Employee Permit Pilot by adding the pay-to-stay option, re-parking prohibition, and/or a merchant validation program. This alternative would allow these strategies to begin under less demanding conditions. It could be

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ALTERNATIVES (continued):

easier to accurately configure each strategy impacting fewer visitors during the setup and adjustment period.

Staff does not recommend either alternative as staff and resources are not currently available to assess and implement the more technological features. The current timing opportunity will allow employees to assimilate into the Employee Parking Pilot slowly and comfortably. It will also allow for a longer period for educating and encouraging compliance.

COORDINATION:

This staff report was prepared in coordination with Parks and Public Works, Economic Vitality and the Police Department.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The overall fiscal impact of the Employee Parking Pilot has not been determined. Conducting the stakeholder surveys will require staff time and no other expenses. The Pilot will use staff time to develop permit registration, place temporary signs, and test the reallocation of parking resources.

Wayfinding and parking branding costs will be estimated in the consultant's proposal. It is anticipated that the consultant contract will be within the Manager's authority.

The adopted Capital Improvement Program contains funding for the initial implementation of the Parking Study recommendations.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is not a project defined under CEQA, and no further action is required.

Attachment:

1. - Surveys