

Downtown Parking Management Plan

City of Sandpoint — June 2025



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City of Sandpoint Downtown Parking Management Plan

Introduction

Sandpoint’s downtown parking management plan implements a system of parking permits, paid hourly parking at Sandpoint’s public downtown parking lots within, and technology-supported enforcement along select blocks in the downtown core where occupancy currently exceeds the 85% target rate that signals an efficiently functioning system. Sandpoint’s system for managing parking downtown has resulted in a utilization pattern under which some facilities experience use levels far above their effective capacity and others far below. Sandpoint’s downtown and City Beach parking lots and curbside parking stalls along parts of First Avenue and Cedar Street experience peak occupancy rates close to 100%, while street parking just a few blocks away from the commercial core sees occupancy rates of below 50%.



Street parking in much of downtown Sandpoint sees peak occupancy rates of less than 50%, indicating underutilization

This plan’s primary objective is to promote a more efficient utilization of public parking facilities to improve the likelihood of users finding an available parking spot in the locations where they are most desired.

The policy’s secondary objective is to provide a funding mechanism to support the ongoing maintenance and development of public off-street parking facilities and other amenities and infrastructure in the downtown core.

A combination of affordable resident parking permits and paid hourly parking for all non-permitholders, combined with the reintroduction of off-street parking requirements and parking in-lieu fees for residential development downtown, will generate revenue that can be put towards maintaining and improving

the City’s public parking infrastructure.

Need and justification for a parking management plan

The policy is based on the findings of Sandpoint’s 2022 Parking Demand Study, which included among its preliminary policies and strategies the proposal to “implement and manage a paid parking program” to “support a vibrant downtown core” and the 2024 Comprehensive Plan, which included among its goals and objectives:

- “Enhance access to businesses, shops, restaurants, and other destinations through parking management solutions” (Chapter 6, Goal 1, A);

- “Refurbish the existing (City) lot, add paid parking.” (Chapter 9), and;
- “Ensure sufficient public parking to enable redevelopment of underutilized properties” (Chapter 9, Goal 5, J)

Revenues generated from parking permits and paid off-street parking for non-permit holders will help support maintenance, enhancements to, and eventually expansion of downtown parking. Most of the revenue generated will come from visitors and tourists whose use currently dominates Sandpoint’s public parking facilities during peak demand periods, yet who pay nothing towards those facilities’ maintenance or eventual replacement costs.

By putting a non-zero price on valuable off-street parking, the City incentivizes efficient land use and encourages alternative modes of transportation, reducing the demand for expansive parking lots that consume valuable urban space. Unpriced parking, on the other hand, distorts urban development patterns, promotes car dependency, and increases housing and commercial costs.

Overview of Plan Components

This Parking Management Plan includes three primary components designed to address the challenges of downtown parking utilization, maintenance funding, and future growth:

1. **Parking Permit Program** – A tiered system of monthly and annual parking permits is offered to City of Sandpoint residents, Bonner County residents, and marina slip occupants. These permits provide limited or unlimited access to City-owned parking facilities and are priced to cover the City’s cost of administering the permit program.
2. **Paid Hourly Parking** – Hourly rates will be implemented at select high-demand off-street parking locations in the downtown core and along the City’s public waterfront. Seasonal rates may be implemented to manage demand during peak and off-peak seasons such that utilization is maintained at an efficient level of occupancy, assuring availability and access for resident passholders where and when parking is needed.
3. **Off-Street Parking Requirements for Residential Development** – Residential projects within the downtown parking exempt zone will be subject to new off-street parking requirements based on square footage, or may opt to pay parking in-lieu fees. These funds will contribute to future public parking investments and help balance residential growth with infrastructure capacity.

Together, these components form a comprehensive strategy that balances parking availability, fiscal sustainability, and long-term downtown vitality.



City Beach parking lot, while seeing little use for most of the year, is at 100% occupancy during peak summer weekends.

Who Pays for Sandpoint's "Free" Parking?

Currently, under the "free-to-park" model, the burden of maintaining downtown Sandpoint's 505 off-street parking spaces and 1,097 curbside stalls falls on the City's General Fund, the Parks Fund (which relies on revenues generated by parks facility users), and occasional grants secured by City staff. This system places an additional burden on residents and parks users while allowing non-resident users to benefit from these facilities without contributing to their upkeep. Maintaining Sandpoint's public parking lots currently costs City of Sandpoint residents around \$85 per household per year, while non-residents, who make up the bulk of the users at City parking lots, pay nothing.

Transitioning to a paid parking model ensures that the non-resident users of Sandpoint's off-street parking facilities contribute their fair share for maintaining and replacing these essential public assets. This policy reflects the City's commitment to creating a fair, sustainable, and financially responsible system for managing its parking resources, ensuring that users contribute equitably to the long-term viability of Sandpoint's public amenities.

Capital costs of Sandpoint's off-street parking

The estimated annual maintenance and replacement cost of downtown Sandpoint's 505 off-street parking spaces is approximately \$290,375, or \$575 per parking space. Typical maintenance includes sweeping, crack sealing, striping, seal-coating, and occasional asphalt repairs, which costs around \$400 per parking stall. The eventual 20-year replacement cost is estimated at \$3,500 per stall (annualized to \$175 per year) based on local construction costs from recent parking lot projects completed in Sandpoint including the City lot at Third and Church Streets and the Travers Park parking lot.

This policy has been developed to correlate to the anticipated maintenance costs the City already bears (or in most cases, defers) in its provision of off-street parking, NOT as a general revenue source to be allocated to capital projects unrelated to downtown parking and related amenities.

Applicability

The paid parking policy applies to the following City-owned parking lots parking facilities downtown and along the City's public waterfront:

1. City lot at Third and Church Streets
2. Bridge Street
3. City Beach / RV Campground
4. City Beach / RV Campground
5. Dock Street (Windbag Marina)



Though it was a pay lot for most of its history, in 2016 the City converted the lot at Third and Church street to free parking. In 2025 the City spent almost a half a million dollars to refurbish the lot at taxpayers expense.

6. Pend Oreille Bay Trail Lot

The North ITD Lot and South ITD Lot across Fifth Avenue are excluded from this policy, as the City does not own these free public lots. The plan includes keeping the 110 spaces across the two ITD-owned parking lots free with no time limits. All street parking will remain free under the approved implementation plan, with technology deployed to improve enforcement of 2-hour time limits on the highest demand blocks downtown.

Parking Permits Program

The policy includes several parking permit options to provide flexible and affordable alternatives to standard hourly parking rates. These permits include annual options for City of Sandpoint residents, Bonner County residents, downtown employees, and marina slip occupants, each tailored to meet the needs of frequent users while ensuring they contribute to the maintenance and replacement costs of Sandpoint's parking infrastructure.

Local resident parking permits

Parking permits available to Sandpoint and Bonner County residents are proposed to allow for all-day (8-hour) free parking in City lots. Permits are priced to reflect the contribution City of Sandpoint taxpayers already make towards the upkeep and maintenance of City parking facilities, which prices established that just cover the City's cost of administering the program. County resident permits will be priced a twice the rate of City resident permits, but will provide the same parking benefit as City permits provide.

Downtown street parking permits

The downtown street parking permit extends the benefit provided to resident permit-holders by offering 24-hours of free parking in City parking lots, but also allowing overstay of the 3- and 4-hour time limits that cover over 700 free street parking stalls just outside the downtown commercial core. Some downtown employees may value the convenience of curbside parking in close to their place of work. A street parking permit will provide the assurance that they will not be ticketed or towed when parking in these time-constrained zones. The street parking permit is not valid in the 2-hour zones, and does not allow overnight parking in public waterfront lots. Downtown employees are not required to purchase a street parking permit, and may use their City or County resident permit to park up to 8 hours each day in the off-street lots downtown.



Sandpoint's downtown and waterfront public parking facilities will be managed via time limits (free on-street parking), permits (on-street and off-street) and paid hourly parking (off-street only) with the goal of increasing availability and convenience of parking for those who need it where they need it when they need it.

Marina slip occupant permits

Seasonal lessees of slips at Sandpoint's public marinas (Windbag and City Beach) have the option to purchase a permit that allows for extended stays (>8 hours) at the City's public waterfront lots, including City Beach and on Dock Street. Boaters who frequently take their vessels on overnight excursions and require waterfront parking may choose this permit to avoid being ticketed or towed for overstaying the 8-hour time limit provided by a City or County resident parking permit.

Boat Launch Fees

The City's two public boat launches (City Beach and Memorial Field) serve a high volume of seasonal and out-of-town boaters whose use imposes wear and operational demands on City infrastructure but who do not otherwise contribute through local taxes. The inclusion of boat launch fees ensures that users of these specialized waterfront facilities contribute to their maintenance and long-term sustainability.

Parking Permits and Boat Launch Fees

Pass Type	Cost	Eligibility	Benefits
City Taxpayer Permit	\$15	City of Sandpoint residents	8-hours free parking at all City-owned parking lots downtown and along the Waterfront. Do NOT provided extended stays in the 2-, 3-, and 4-hour on-street parking zones
Bonner County resident pass	\$30	Bonner County residents residing outside City limits	8-hours free parking at all City-owned parking lots downtown and along the Waterfront. Do NOT provided extended stays in the 2-, 3-, and 4-hour on-street parking zones
Downtown Street Parking (monthly)	\$40	Anyone	24-hour parking in City-owned downtown lots (not including waterfront lots) and in the 3- and 4-hour street parking zones
Marina Slip Occupant Pass (annual)	\$100	Windbag or City Beach slip occupants	Unlimited parking at Dock Street and City Beach lots
Boat Launch fee (Idaho State resident*)	\$10/launch	Idaho state residents	City Beach and Memorial Field boat launches
Boat Launch fee (Out-of-state resident and commercial users**)	\$15/launch	Out-of-state residents and commercial users	City Beach and Memorial Field boat launches
Boat launch season pass (Idaho State resident)	\$50	Idaho state residents	City Beach and Memorial Field boat launches
Boat launch season pass (Out-of-state resident)	\$100	Out-of-state residents	City Beach and Memorial Field boat launches

*Vehicles with boat trailers will be subject to passholder time limits and charged at twice the standard hourly rate for passenger vehicles.

**Commercial operations using City Boat launches must pay on a per-launch basis (no season pass option)

Parking Enforcement: Fair, Modern, Consistent

A key goal of Sandpoint's Parking Management Plan is to ensure that parking rules are clear, fair, and consistently enforced. For many years, enforcement of downtown parking time limits has been difficult to manage using traditional methods. The new parking system will allow the City to enforce existing parking rules more accurately and consistently while making it easier for drivers to comply.

The guiding principle of the new system is simple: Locals first. Convenient options for residents, downtown workers, and downtown residents, while ensuring parking remains available for customers and visitors.

Sandpoint Parking Management Plan proposes operating a license plate-based parking system, whereby permit holders will tie their permits to a specific vehicle, and parking sessions will be initiated by non-permit holders by entering their license plate into a kiosk or a mobile app. Recent legislation in the State of Idaho prohibited the use of Automated License Plate reader technology for any law enforcement effort beyond investigating felony offenses, so the use of such technology for implementation of a parking program is no longer feasible.

Tying parking permits and paid parking sessions to license plate numbers streamlines enforcement of on-street time limits and eliminated the need for outdated methods such as chalking tires, creating a consistent and transparent system for enforcement.



The Sand Creek lot (also known as Farmin's Landing), with 30 parking spaces, lacks effective stormwater treatment; paid parking can fund needed improvements



Dock Street's 49 parking stalls fully occupied by 10am on summer days. Parking permits available only to marina slipholders will increase likelihood boaters will find parking near their slips

Paid Hourly Parking

To improve parking availability and help maintain Sandpoint's public parking facilities, the City will implement paid parking in City-owned parking lots located in the downtown and waterfront areas. The goal is simple: Residents park free with a permit. Visitors pay hourly.

Charging non-permit holding visitors and tourists to park will improve availability and access to the most desired parking stalls in City-owned parking lots for local permit holders, while assuring that non-resident users of those resources have the opportunity to contribute financially to their maintenance and upkeep.

Drivers without a resident permit will be able to pay for parking using several options including paying at a kiosk with a credit card, paying via text message, or paying via mobile app. Like the permit system, parking sessions will be tied to vehicle license plates, meaning parking enforcement officers can easily verify payment status electronically and issue citations accordingly based on payment status or status of stay duration for individual parkers.

Parking Requirements and In-Lieu Fees for Residential Development within the Parking Exempt Zone

To support public parking infrastructure and ensure the long-term viability of downtown Sandpoint's parking system, this plan implements off-street parking requirements for new residential development within the downtown parking exempt zone. Developers will be required to either provide parking at a rate based on the square footage of residential development, or to pay a parking in-lieu fee, which will contribute toward the future construction of structured public parking facilities and other parking-related improvements.

Under current City code (Title 9, Chapter 5 "Off-street parking requirements"), no developments, residential or non-residential, within the downtown parking exempt zones, are required to provide off-street parking. This plan includes the implementation of an off-street parking requirement for residential development within this zone, with the option for developers to pay parking in-lieu fees to support the City's Parking Improvement Fund. An ordinance amending 89-5 "Off-street parking requirements" will be brought to City Council to enact the policy described in this plan.



Parking meters lined Sandpoint's busiest commercial corridors until 1990, encouraging turnover of spaces, promoting convenient access to local businesses for customers

Off-street parking requirements for Residential Development within Parking Exempt Area

The off-street parking required for residential development in what is currently the parking exempt zone will be for one off-street parking space per 1,000 square feet of residential development, up to 1,500 sf per dwelling unit. A maximum of 1.5 parking spaces will be required for units larger than 1,500 sf.

Example 1: A downtown condo development that includes ten units 1,200 square feet in size and six units 1,800 square feet in size shall be required to provide the following:

For the 1,200 square foot units:

$$10 \text{ units} \times 1,200 \text{ sf} = 12,000 \text{ sf}$$

$$12,000 \div 1,000 = 12 \text{ parking spaces required}$$



Restoring off-street parking requirements and parking in-lieu fees downtown will assure sustainable funding for future parking facilities

For the 1,800 square foot units:

$$6 \text{ units} \times 1.5 \text{ spaces per unit} = 9 \text{ parking spaces required}$$

Total parking required for the 16-unit development =
21 parking spaces

Example 2: A downtown workforce housing development that includes twenty 500 square-foot apartments shall be required to provide the following:

$$20 \text{ units} \times 500 \text{ sf} = 10,000 \text{ sf}$$

$$10,000 \div 1,000 = 10 \text{ parking spaces required}$$

Why is less parking required for the smaller apartments? Tying parking requirements to square footage instead of number of units or bedrooms incentivizes developers to build smaller, more affordable housing units in downtown Sandpoint. Larger, more expensive residential development is required to either provide more parking per unit developed or pay more in in lieu fees. Keeping the parking requirement lower for smaller efficiency housing helps keep such housing affordable for local workers who may or may not require the parking that larger, higher end development provides.



Off-street parking requirements lead to valuable commercial real estate developed as under-utilized blocks of asphalt

In-Lieu Fees for Downtown Residential Development

Off-street parking requirements for residential development in the downtown parking exempt zone may be offset by paying parking in-lieu fees into the City's parking improvement fund. A parking in-lieu fee of an amount set by City Council resolution, which may be amended from time to time to approximate changes in costs of implementing the parking improvement fund, will be established.

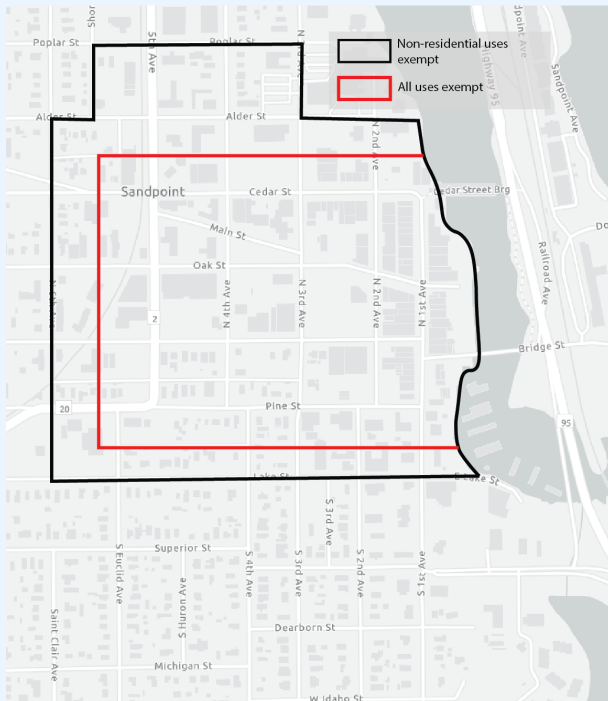
Staff are recommending a parking in-lieu fee of \$25,000 per space be established at the time this policy is adopted. This fee was arrived at by comparing parking in-lieu fees in 30 cities across North America (data assembled for a parking in-lieu report prepared for the City of Boise in 2012). The \$25,000 figure further reflects a fair share of the current cost of structured parking facilities in North America, which are estimated to cost in the range of \$30,000 - \$50,000 per parking stall in 2025 dollars.

The goal of the parking in-lieu fee program applied to residential development in Sandpoint's parking exempt zone is to either:

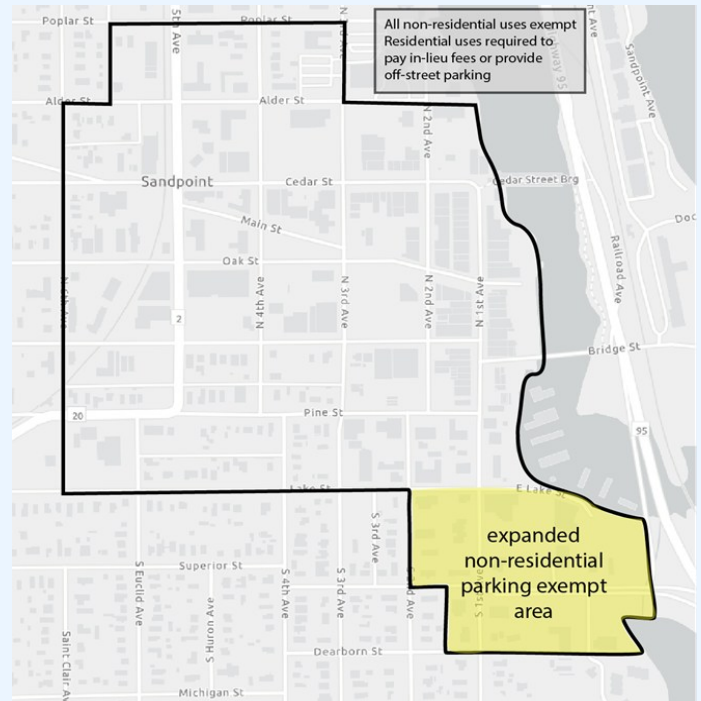
- Incentivize developers to provide adequate off-street parking to meet the demands for their residential developments, or
- Require developers to pay a fair share of the cost of a City-developed parking structure through in-lieu fees that reflect the true cost of providing off-street parking for their residential developments.

Revised Downtown Parking Exempt and Residential In-Lieu Zone

Exempted non-residential use and residential in-lieu area boundaries are described in Title 9, Chapter 5 of Sandpoint City Code. This plan expands the boundaries to the southeast to include commercially zoned properties along both sides of First Avenue and Superior Street.



Current parking exempt zones. All development within the red boundary and non-residential within the black boundary are exempt from off-street parking requirements



New non-residential parking exempt area. All development required to provide one stall per 1,000 sf of residential floor space. Non-residential development remains exempt from off-street parking requirements

Implications of Boundary Expansion

The proposed southeast expansion of the non-residential parking exempt area will newly include commercially zoned properties along both sides of First Avenue and Superior Street. This change carries two primary implications:

First, non-residential development within the expanded boundary—such as new or redeveloped retail, office, or service uses—will be exempt from off-street parking requirements, reducing development barriers and promoting walkable, mixed-use redevelopment in this centrally located part of downtown.

Second, new residential development within the expanded area will now be subject to the specific off-street parking requirements outlined in this plan, rather than those applicable to the rest of Sandpoint. Outside the exempt zone, residential parking requirements are based on the number of bedrooms and unit size, often resulting in 1.5 to 2 spaces per unit. Within the revised exempt boundary, by contrast, residential development must provide one off-street space per 1,000 square feet of floor area (up to 1,500 sf per unit), or pay in-lieu fees consistent with this policy. This approach is designed to incentivize smaller, more affordable housing types in the downtown core and to ensure that developers of larger residential projects contribute fairly to the City's long-term parking infrastructure.

Developer Communication and Support

The City recognizes that the introduction of off-street parking requirements and in-lieu fees for residential development within the previously exempt downtown zone represents a significant policy shift. To support a smooth transition, City staff will provide clear guidance, updated application materials, and one-on-one pre-application assistance to help developers understand and plan for the new requirements. By establishing a clear, consistent framework and offering flexible compliance options—either through on-site parking or in-lieu payments—the City aims to balance development feasibility with the long-term goal of sustaining a functional and equitable public parking system.

Use of Funds and Parking Benefit Best Practices

While this plan does not propose specific uses for general parking revenue, staff encourages Council to consider how other communities reinvest such funds to improve the neighborhoods where they are collected. Many cities designate downtown parking revenue as a form of parking benefit district funding, directing it toward projects that increase access, safety, and economic vitality in the area.

Best practices from comparable cities include allocating general parking revenue toward:

- Streetscape enhancements, including lighting, crosswalks, benches, and sidewalk improvements
- Public transportation support, such as expanded transit routes, bus shelters, or last-mile mobility solutions
- Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, including protected bike lanes, racks, and traffic calming
- Maintenance and technology upgrades for curbside parking (e.g., signage, digital pay kiosks, and real-time availability systems.
- Downtown beautification, wayfinding, and public space improvements that enhance the visitor experience and support downtown businesses

By keeping potential reinvestments close to where parking revenues are generated, many cities have found that paid parking becomes more publicly accepted, especially when the benefits are visible, tangible, and district-specific.

Importantly, all costs associated with implementing and administering the paid parking system, including technology, signage, maintenance, transaction fees, and enforcement, will be paid from this general parking revenue stream, not from the General Fund or other City revenue sources. This ensures that the program is fully self-sustaining and that those who use the public parking system are the ones funding its operations and oversight.



Basic maintenance of Sandpoint's public parking facilities has been underfunded for decades, resulting in deteriorated infrastructure. When repairs have been made, they have been at property taxpayers' expense

Ultimately, decisions about the use of general parking revenue will rest with City Council through the annual budget process. This plan simply outlines how strategic reinvestment, based on proven models in peer cities, can amplify the community benefits of a well-managed parking system

Summary

Under the current parking system, access to Sandpoint’s public parking lots and curbside parking is rationed through a “first come, first serve” model that has led to a situation where, during peak demand periods, 97% of off-street parking stalls are occupied. Meanwhile, downtown on-street parking is occupied at only 51% at summer peak hour. Sandpoint’s parking problem is a utilization problem, not a *supply problem*. The total number of public parking spaces downtown is adequate to meet the total peak demand for parking, as there are 559 empty parking spaces at the peak summer hour. The problem is that of these vacant stalls, 545 are on-street stalls and only 14 are off-street. Implementing paid parking at the parking facilities currently occupied beyond their effective capacity will help resolve this inefficient utilization.



First Avenue in Sandpoint, Idaho

Photo: Will Hawkins

Paid parking has been used to manage occupancy, promote turnover, and generate revenue for downtown infrastructure for most of Sandpoint’s history as an automobile-dependent community. This plan restores some of the policies used throughout the 20th and early 21st century to improve availability of public parking and generate revenues to reinvest in the downtown district it serves.

By attaching a price to what is currently an un-priced amenity, demand is expected to shift from scarce off-street parking to relatively abundant street parking, and from currently over-utilized curbside stalls along First and Second Avenues and Cedar Street to underutilized stalls further from the commercial core.

Currently, Sandpoint generates no revenue from its off-street parking facilities. This leaves the City with a significant funding gap, as the estimated annual cost of maintaining and eventually replacing the 505 off-street stalls alone is approximately \$290,375. In the absence of paid parking, this financial burden falls entirely on City taxpayers, allowing non-resident users of Sandpoint's parking facilities to benefit without contributing to their upkeep.

Overall, the transition to a paid off-street parking model promotes equity and fiscal responsibility by aligning the costs of maintaining Sandpoint's parking facilities with their actual usage, turning Sandpoint's five downtown off-street parking facilities from a liability into an asset, whose value for future generations is secured through a sustainable funding mechanism.

Furthermore, the reintroduction of parking requirements and parking in-lieu fees for residential development downtown will relieve the City's public parking infrastructure from bearing the increased burden of residential demand for parking and require developers to contribute a fair share towards providing parking directly or supporting the City's eventual investment in a public parking structure through parking in lieu payments.

Finally, this parking management plan directly supports several goals and objectives of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan, particularly in the areas of Multimodal Transportation, Community Character and Design, and Jobs & Economic Development. By managing parking demand through pricing, the policy aligns with the Plan's focus on enhancing access to businesses and reducing congestion in high-demand areas (Chapter 6, Multimodal Transportation). It fosters efficient land use, preserving Sandpoint's vibrant downtown while reducing the need for expansive parking infrastructure that detracts from the city's character (Chapter 3, Community Character and Design).

The revenue generated supports infrastructure maintenance and economic growth by ensuring a steady funding stream for public facilities, thereby promoting fiscal sustainability and investment in Sandpoint's downtown economy (Chapter 9, Jobs & Economic Development). This integrated approach reflects the Plan's vision of creating a dynamic, accessible, and economically resilient community.



Paid parking in Sandpoint creates a fairer, more sustainable system by improving access for residents, funding critical infrastructure through user fees, and ensuring that visitors who benefit from our downtown also help support its upkeep.

APPENDIX A:

2022 Downtown Parking Study

APPENDIX B:

Parking Pass Fee Schedule

APPENDIX C:

Revenue Estimates

APPENDIX D:

Parking Satisfaction Survey Responses and Analysis

APPENDIX E:

Calculations of residential in-lieu fees and fees as a percentage of total development cost