

Administration

To: Downtown Main Street Task Force

From: Mason Becker, Manager of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives

Date: June 22, 2025

Subject: Park and Ride considerations

Background

The topic of offering “Park and Ride” services during the 2028 Main Street reconstruction project has come up several times, both in Task Force meetings and in discussions with downtown business owners and other stakeholders.

A few considerations:

Park and ride programs can be a valuable tool to mitigate traffic congestion and improve mobility during major reconstruction projects, such as highway or road closures. By establishing locations where residents and visitors can park their vehicles and transfer to buses or other modes of transportation, these programs can reduce the number of vehicles on affected roadways.

Key aspects

- **Traffic Management:** Park and ride programs help manage traffic flow by intercepting motorists before they enter congested areas affected by construction.
- **Community Involvement:** Successful implementation involves the local community (merchants, employers, residents) in the planning and design process to address concerns and ensure the program meets community needs.
- **Benefits:** These programs can reduce traffic congestion, encourage visitors to areas (such as the downtown), enhance resident well-being, and potentially reduce parking costs for the City (such as acquiring additional property for parking).
- **Costs:** Costs are primarily associated with operation, which in the case of Watertown, would likely mean contracting with a private company.

Considerations

- **Timeframe:** Designing and implementing a park and ride system generally requires more than a short lead-time, but this is less a concern given the reconstruction project will be occurring in 2028.
- **Service Times:** It is likely that park & ride services would only need to be offered during certain days or dayparts, such as evenings or weekends.
- **Funding:** Park and ride services often require subsidies, either through the municipality or other organizations or businesses.
- **Evaluating Effectiveness:** Assessing the actual impact of park and ride on traffic reduction and visitation to the downtown requires data-driven analysis, considering factors such as time of day, weather, etc. One method could be through use of geofencing programs, which track entry and exit of mobile devices around a given area.
- **Balancing Needs:** Striking a balance between the needs of motorists and the goal of promoting visitation to Watertown's downtown needs to be considered. While park and rides may reduce traffic and increase visitation to the downtown area, it might also shift vehicle miles traveled to areas surrounding the designated park and ride locations.

Budget Goal

Fosters community growth by assessing opportunities, stakeholder input, environmental needs, and modern code and policy priorities

Financial Impact

Financial cost of offering such services would need to be evaluated and potentially budgeted for by the City in 2028. As a reference, the hourly cost for bus services during Riverfest for 2024 was about \$80-90/hr with everything needed to run the service (including cleaning fees, supervisory fees, etc). There could be potential to collaborate with other groups on funding, or to solicit sponsorships.

Recommendation

No formal action is needed. This item is for discussion purposes only.