Downtown Parking

INTRODUCTION

The study area for this project is Downtown Sweet Home, defined as including the area bordered by 10th Avenue to the west, Long Street to the south, 15th Avenue along the eastern boundary and Main Street to the north. The inventory included on-street evaluation of capacity.

The land uses within the study area include a mix of retail, commercial, civic, public and recreational activities, as well as historic features that are appropriate for an emerging and vital downtown core area.

The Resource Team conducted a parking inventory and selected parking utilization review of public parking assets within the study area. Elements of the parking study included:

- Inventory parking in the downtown.
- Evaluation of "typical day" parking use to determine peak hour utilization in a smaller area identified as the "core area" of downtown, identified by local business owners as the area of highest use. The core area includes the area bordered by 13th Avenue to the east, 10th Avenue to the west, Main Street to the north and Long Street on the south.
- Identification of parking surpluses and constraints in the parking supply in the downtown.

The purpose of the parking study was to produce a "snapshot" analysis of existing parking dynamics in downtown Sweet Home that could be employed to develop strategies for managing the downtown parking supply as Sweet Home grows.

PARKING INVENTORY

An approximate total of 612 on- and off-street parking stalls were identified within the study area. Of these, approximately 219 were on-street and approximately 393 were off-street stalls. On-street parking is fairly evenly distributed throughout the study area. A number of small off-street lots are located throughout downtown, with the largest publicly available (although privately owned) lot located off of Long Street between 10th and 12th Avenues.

W&H Pacific, Inc. conducted a previous downtown parking analysis in 1998. However, that study included a larger area than this project, and did not conduct any utilization rate analysis, so a direct comparison of this study's results with the previous study is not possible.

CAPACITY ANALYSIS

The capacity inventory was conducted on Tuesday, March 18, 2003 for the study area. The utilization inventory was conducted over a six-hour period (10:00 AM to 4:00 PM) on Wednesday, March 19, 2003 for the core area of highest demand. This time period was selected to include the period identified as "peak" by local business owners. The day was mild (low 60 degrees) and rainy, with average activity in downtown. It should be noted that March would be considered an off-peak visitor month, with no recreational activities, or special events.

The capacity analysis began with a compilation of public parking spaces (on and off-street) within the study area. Parking was documented by location and type and was used to create a data template necessary to conduct the utilization assessment for the core area. Of the approximately 612 total parking spaces in the study area, approximately 145 are located in the core area, including 47 on-street and 98 off-street.

The utilization study involved an hourly accounting of each occupied on-street and off-street parking space in the Core Area. Table 1 shows the results of this study.

TABLE 1: UTILIZATION RATES: CORE AREA

TIME	***ONSTREET***		***OFF-STREET***	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
10:00 AM	**14**	**30%**	**33**	**25%**
11:00 AM	**20**	**43%**	**41**	**31%**
12:00	**16**	**34%**	**45**	**34%**
1:00 PM	**17**	**36%**	**33**	**25%**
2:00 PM	**14**	**30%**	**37**	**28%**
3:00 PM	**10**	**21%**	**27**	**20%**
4:00 PM	**25**	**53%**	**30**	**23%**
Average Utilization		***35%***		***26%***

"Peak hour occupancy" for a downtown is the period during the business day where there is the highest utilization of parking spaces. The peak hour for the core area for this utilization study was not distinct, with slightly more spaces used at 11 AM and 4 PM.

The overall occupancy for the core area was around 30%. At 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM, the percentage of occupancy rose to about 37%.

The generally accepted industry standard for optimum parking utilization is 80-90%. When parking utilization approaches this level, certain steps are triggered, as described below. Using 85% occupancy 'rule,' the completed survey demonstrates that there is an existing surplus of parking in the downtown.

It is recommended that the utilization rate survey be conducted again during a peak period to determine how parking usage differs at other times of the year. The following steps should be used to re-conduct the utilization study:

1. Determine the times and days to check parking useage. If weekday parking is identified as the problem, the study should be done on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Do not perform the study the week of spring break or during any other unusual event.

   The typical inventory period for an hourly parking count is the period between 11AM and 4PM. This period can be adjusted if observations indicate that a shorter or longer period would be more appropriate.

   If the whole study area cannot be done in one day, count separate sections on different days. For example, if one area can be completed in a single day, do that on a Tuesday at all the appointed hours, then complete the remainder of the area on another day.

2. Count the occupied parking spaces. This can occur on a map or by using the inventory sheets. If the inventory sheets are used, data will be transferred to the map. The circuit should be counted hourly, and the same counting pattern should be repeated each time as this improves accuracy.

3. Calculate parking occupancy by block. First, add up the available spaces and all the occupied spaces for each time period. Divide the number of occupied spaces by the number of available spaces to calculate the average occupancy rate. The results will show your overall parking utilization rate for the downtown area. The goal is a rate of less than 85%.

4. For any of the blocks that are at or near capacity (over 75%), it is also useful to break the utilization rate down by block, or block face, and hour. This will allow patterns to be revealed of where and when there are any problems. At this point, it is possible to determine if a turnover study is needed.

TURN-OVER ANALYSIS

No turn-over analysis was performed for this project. If the utilization rate study performed during the peak period demonstrates that any portion of the core area is approaching 85%, then it is recommended that a turn-over analysis be conducted to determine if 2-hour spaces are being occupied for significantly longer than two hours. A turn-over analysis is conducted by recording three digits of a parked car's license plate on an hourly basis, then analyzing the results. This reveals whether users are parking for the posted length of time. For maximum efficiency and economic benefit, the on-street spots should not be utilized for long-term parking. A result that shows misuse of parking spaces could lead to a discussion about the need for increased enforcement.

PARKING POLICY GUIDELINES

The guidelines for parking in downtown Sweet Home are based on the desire to create a system of parking access that supports, facilitates and contributes to a healthy downtown. The guidelines serve as a framework for near- and long-term decision-making and implementation of parking decisions and management in downtown.

These guidelines are based on the premise that long-term development of the downtown will require an integrated and comprehensive package of strategies to stimulate economic development and redevelopment. The parking component of that overall plan is one element of a larger approach to downtown improvements.

- **Make the downtown accessible to all users.** Access should be provided to all users of the downtown, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists, and delivery vehicles. The City should strive to create and implement as many access options as possible.

- **Make the downtown parking convenient for Customers and Visitors.** The core area of downtown should provide parking that supports its role as the central point from which the priority users, customers and visitors, are connected to shops, businesses, and visitor facilities. The most convenient parking spaces should be reserved to support customer and visitor access to downtown.

- **Provide sufficient parking.** Enough parking should be provided to support desired and priority economic activities.

- **Provide adequate employee parking.** Adequate parking with reasonable access should be provided to meet employee needs, in conjunction with a transportation system that provides balanced travel mode options.

- **Preserve and expand on-street parking wherever possible.** On-street parking should be preserved along strategic corridors to improve customer/visitor accessibility and to facilitate revitalization of street level

activities. On-street access should, in some cases, take priority over street capacity and vehicle speeds.

- **Improve access linkages between other parts of the city and the downtown core.** Access linkages within the core and other parts of the city should be clearly identified through signage, way-finding measures and other communication strategies to increase customer understanding of the downtown parking system.

- **Implement education and communication programs to improve downtown parking.** Efforts should be made to educate employees, customers and other users of the downtown of the general purpose and intent for parking and access in the downtown.

PARKING MANAGEMENT PLAN

This section presents the recommended parking management plan for downtown Sweet Home. This plan establishes consistency with the Parking Policies and gives direction to future decision-making. The Management Plan provides a flexible system of parking management that is triggered by demand.

The purpose of the parking management plan is to:

- Clearly define the intended use and purpose of the parking system,
- Manage the supply and enforce the parking policies,
- Monitor use and respond to changes in demand, and
- Maintain the intended function of the overall system.

The Rule of 85%

The Rule of 85% is a measure of parking utilization that acts as a benchmark against which parking management decisions are based. Within the parking industry, it is assumed that when an inventory of parking exceeds 85% occupancy in the peak hour the supply becomes constrained, and may not provide full and convenient access to its intended user. Once a supply of parking routinely exceeds 85% occupancy in the peak hour, the Rule of 85% would require that parking management strategies be implemented to bring peak hour occupancies to a level below 85% to assure that intended uses are conveniently accommodated.

The recently completed parking inventory for Sweet Home revealed that existing peak hour occupancies are significantly less than 85%. Having the Rule of 85% in effect will

assure that a process for evaluating and responding to future parking activity in the downtown is in place.

Downtown Parking

The purpose of parking in downtown is to support and enhance the vitality of the downtown core. In the downtown core, the following management rules should apply:

- All on-street parking will be 2-hour parking based on the principle that:

  - The 2-hour time stay allows adequate customer, visitor and client access to the retail core; and

  - Uniform time stays foster a parking environment that is easy for the customer, visitor and client to understand.

- The priority for **on-street parking** in the downtown will be 2-hour parking. As strategies within this plan are implemented, any on-street spaces of longer duration will be transitioned to off-street locations within the Core Zone and immediately adjacent to it.

- The priority for **off-street parking** in the downtown will be stays of less than 4 hours to accommodate customers, visitors and clients. These facilities are intended to provide for a moderately longer time stay than allowed on street.

- The City will conduct regular utilization and turn-over studies to ascertain the actual peak hour utilization and average turnover of parking resources in the downtown area. If utilization of on- and off-street parking exceeds 85% and turnover meets desired rates, the City will evaluate and implement one, or a combination of, the following implementation steps triggered by the 85% Rule:

  - Increase level of enforcement to assure desired rate of turnover and minimize abuse (i.e., exceeding time stay, employees moving to evade a parking ticket).

  - Transition overall mix of short-term or 15-minute stalls to 2 hour stalls.

  - Reduce on-street time stays to increase turnover (e.g., 2-hours to 90 minutes)

  - Transition employee parking in the core into less centrally located parking.

- Pursue shared-use agreements with private lots to provide for additional parking capacity in downtown.
- Create new public supply of parking in downtown.

- The City will establish policy guidelines for exceptions to the short-term parking requirements in the downtown.
  - Handicapped/disabled access
  - 15 minute zones

➢ Specific criteria for approval (i.e., by specific business type)

➢ Specific locations (i.e., end of block vs. mid block)

➢ Number per geographic area

  - Loading zones

➢ Maximum number per block face(s)

➢ Limitation on number per geographic area (e.g., no more than two for every three continuous block faces)

Signing and Striping

The City should consider directional signage on the roadways that directs customers to specific facilities. This will be of greatest importance at primary portals into downtown, at major traffic intersections within downtown, and at primary points of ingress at specific facilities.

The City should create a uniform sign system for off-street facilities owned or operated by the City of Sweet Home.

- The City should establish a consistent sign package that incorporates a uniform design, logo, and color package into all information signage related to parking.
- Each off-street public facility should be named by its location (e.g., Front at 10th).
- City signs at off-street facilities should direct customers to the nearest available visitor lot (e.g., "Employee Parking Only, Visitor Parking at Front & 10th).
- The City should work with ODOT to mark individual parking spaces along Main Street to increase efficiency.

Marketing and Communications

The City of Sweet Home should develop a marketing and communication system for downtown parking. This can consist of the following items.

- Develop maps that visually display the parking areas and lots and identify the location of visitor versus employee facilities.
- Validation program. Evaluate the feasibility of retail and theater validation systems if the City moves to enforcement and ticketing.
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) alternatives. Incorporate alternative mode options (i.e., shuttles, transit, and bicycle) into parking materials.

Pricing

Given the size of Sweet Home and its current and anticipated growth, it is not suggested that the City implement parking pricing at the present time. However, as the 85% Rule is triggered, additional and more aggressive management of the supply is needed. Sweet Home may at some future point consider pricing parking. At that point, pricing would be intended to (a) facilitate more efficient turnover, (b) encourage use of specific facilities in specific management zones (i.e., short-term vs. employee parking), (c) encourage use of alternative modes, and (d) provide a funding source for new supply and alternative mode options. The following options may be considered:

- Meter on-street parking to increase efficiency and capacity.
- Charge for parking in publicly owned off-street facilities.
- Establish a "Downtown Parking Fund" from revenues derived from downtown public parking.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARKING IMPROVEMENTS

Near-Term Implementation

- Mark on-street parking spaces to increase efficiency
- Create an agreement with property owners for public use of:
  - Lot on Long St. west of pizza business
  - Lot on Long St. between drugstore and laundromat
  - Credit property owners ("public parking provided by…")
- Mark spaces as "reserved for" specific uses
- Stripe and sign several pull-through RV spaces in public lot (dual use)
- Create a clear parking signage program
  - Develop a logo/identity for off street public parking lots.
  - Upgrade on-street directional signage to incorporate logo/identity
  - Install uniform signage at all public off street parking facilities

Additional Study

- Re-do utilization study during "peak season" – after boating season begins
- Perform a turnover study (measures how long parking spaces are being used)

Longer-Term

- Continue to repeat utilization studies – implement 85% Rule
- Create additional RV spaces in the downtown area
- Improve pedestrian access between Long St. parking lot and Main St.
- Consolidate or remove driveway cuts on Main St. and Long St. to increase on-street parking

- Discuss clear zone length with ODOT and reduce if feasible
- Implement a parking management program:
  - Enforce 2-hr parking on-street,
  - Mark off-street parking for 4-hr or "all-day"
  - Evaluate and reduce 15-minute stalls if they are underutilized