Parking Committee
of the Northampton Transportation and Parking Commission
Minutes
Thursday, May 29, 2014, 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm
Room 10, City Hall, 210 Main Street, Northampton

Holly Mott opened the public meeting at 5:05 PM. There was no audio/video recording.

Members present/absent: Chair Holly Mott, Wayne Feiden, Adam Novitt, Susan Timberlake, and Marc Warner.

MEMBERS

Holly Mott - Chair
Citizen

Wayne Feiden
Director of Planning and
Sustainability

Adam Novitt
Citizen

Susan Timberlake
Citizen

Marc Warner
Citizen

1. The committee viewed two time lapse videos that Adam Novitt created showing patterns of parking on Main Street as visible from City Hall.

2. The committee set Thursday July 10, 2014 at 5:00 PM for their next meeting. Susan Timberlake will not be able to attend that meeting.

3. Approval of Minutes of April 17, 2014: Upon motion by Susan Timberlake and second by Adam Novitt, the committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

4. Public Comment: Jonathon Gottsche, Bright Street resident, Bright Street overwhelmed with free public parking and requested residents-only parking for the street.

5. Parking Principles (version discussed by committee attached): There was general agreement in principle on the guiding principles, with the exception of Susan Timberlake who disagreed with the concept of pricing based on demand because of concerns about impacts on businesses. Feiden will do copying editing, send to Mott, who will do final editing and present to the next Transportation and Parking Committee. The committee agreed that after the parking principles the committee will refocus on the zoning reform package.

6. Citizen parking complaints procedure: The committee agreed that as they hear complaints they will pass them on to the Transportation and Parking Commission but will not be part of any formal complaint process.

7. The committee discussed the need to get a representative(s) from the business community back onto the committee. Holly Mott will reach out to the Chamber and BID to invite them to nominate a member to serve.

The committee adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Parking Principles

This white paper is meant to provide an overview of recurring themes encountered by the Parking Committee as they went about the business in a convivial manner. The ideas presented here should be used as a backdrop when considering changes to our current parking system.

Goals

The goal of parking reform in Northampton is to facilitate the best use of parking resources in our city. We believe that this will help create a space where it is pleasant to live, visit, and work. Our success as a community draws people here to be with one another. Often, they come by car.

In an ideal system nearly every space is filled and drivers find spaces easily. Such a system provides the best access to where people want to be, when they want to be there. It encourages people to return, is easy to use and understand, and meets the needs of different types of users.

We seek to minimise the use of punitive measures such as towing and ticketing. Punitive measures can be seen as a signal of how much a system has failed in its design. Tickets and towing indicate a failure to communicate, provide clear instruction and present good alternatives. Punitive measure are powerful forces that drive people away from living in and visiting downtown. They hurt quality of life and business in a manner disproportionate to their usefulness.

The parking system is, essentially, a matrix that encourages people to make choices about where they park. This matrix includes restrictions, fees, time limits, signage. Parking reform should be seen as a way to incentivise people to make choices in ways that benefit them and the city.

Methodology:

1. Recognize the users:

There are several user groups that are in conflict with each other for the limited parking available in Northampton. Each group supports the city in different ways and has unique needs. We need to encourage each group to find solutions that work for it while minimally inconveniencing other groups. The main parking users in the city can be broken down to residents, students, visitors and proletariat. This is easily remembered by the initialism RSVP.

Residents need spaces overnight, and may have trouble finding them when they return from work. Residents park here every day. Since they are long-term and constant users, they may be more amiable to solutions that take a little work on their part, like applying and potentially paying for on-street parking stickers. *Residents park near their homes. Densely populated areas near downtown present a challenge.*

Students also live in the city, but make less frequent use of their cars. So, while it would be very inconvenient for a resident to walk a quarter-mile for their parking daily, it may be perfectly acceptable for a student to do so. The City may be able to work with Smith College to help steer students into making parking decisions that are mutually beneficial to both town and gown. *Students park a reasonable walk from where they live on the Smith College campus.*

Visitors are probably the most parking-sensitive group here. Unlike residents, students' and workers' trips to Northampton are often by choice. They can spend their time and money here, or someplace else. Many visitors come to Northampton only a few times a year so do not understand all the options available to them. We need to discourage all other users from using the most desirable spaces (along Main Street and in downtown proper) in order to keep visitors coming downtown and spending money. *Visitors park as close as possible to where they shop, when they want to shop.*

Proletariat are workers who come to the city during business hours like visitors and generally would like to park in the same spaces as them. Since they're in the city often, they can be encouraged to better understand the overall parking picture and possibly make use of some lesser-known parking options such as the Roundhouse Lot. There is also potential for workers to be able to use some city resident parking while the residents are away at work. *Workers park a walkable distance from downtown.*

The underlying structure should incentivise everyone except visitors to park off of Main Street during peak hours. The remainder of the system should create ways to effectively apportion nearby parking to residents and proletariat in ways that minimise conflict between groups. Smith students, who live and work on campus, should be incentivised to store their cars away from dense residential neighborhoods close to the city core.

2. See the whole system. Parking works as a complete system, not as isolated components. it is important to look at how elements interact.

Area We need to recognize that parking pressure extends beyond the metered space downtown. Lack of parking controls over streets close to downtown brings residents and workers into conflict in areas close to the city core. Price, availability, and demand force drivers out of metered parking and into nearby areas.

Transportation How people arrive in town will affect demand on parking. Increased walkability and bikeability will reduce demand. A poorly designed parking system can increase gridlock. Implementation of a transportation hub can increase or decrease parking demand depending on its location. As a key component of transportation parking is more than car storage, parking is part of a system that is influenced by and has influence on forces as varied and festivals, business, safety and housing.

3. Price to demand

Price is a key factor in helping people choose parking options that will help our system operate effectively. It is one aspect of the system that we have direct control over and can change easily. Unlike adding spaces or building a garage price change can happen overnight.

An effective system distributes drivers to parking spaces in a way that minimises wait times to find a space and maximises the utilization of spaces. High prices in the area of greatest demand, high enough to dissuade ever would be parker from grabbing a space if one is available during peak hours, can create positive effects.

Wait times to find a space are reduced because fewer cars are hunting for available spots in the area of greatest demand. In effect, cars are distributed over a wider area when looking for spaces. This also reduces congestion in the city core and reduces potential car/pedestrian interaction.

It better utilizes spaces by sending cars into areas that may be less desirable on an absolute level when only factors like proximity to businesses are concerned. These spaces have better value when the whole equation of desirability versus price is considered.

Price to demand may also mean charging in areas where no fee was assigned before, like neighborhoods in proximity to downtown. Pricing though meters, vouchers, passes or other systems can alleviate parking problems in the city core incentivising groups to use outlying space in ways that reduce pressure on the areas in highest demand e.g when residents leave for work elsewhere the space becomes available to workers.

Price to demand may mean reducing or eliminating parking fees when demand is low, such as during early morning hours. It can mean charging where we didn't before, such as in the evening.

Ticketing and towing are a form a pricing. The can be viewed as a failure of the system to provide good options or clearly communicate those options. Unlike pricing to demand ticketing and towing discourage visitors from returning and create conflict with the city and users. Ticketing and towing should be used as an indicator of the success or failure of any reform.

Changes in pricing can have powerful positive effects and designers of the system need to be open to the whole scope of possibility when either raising prices or eliminating them. According to UCLA professor Donald Shoup, author of *The High Cost of Free Parking*, "the right price is the lowest price you can charge and still have one or two spaces available on each block."

4. Make sure the end user understands.

Build a rational system If we create a parking system that take into account core factors as it is developed patterns and systems will be integrated into it that will make the system logical in its layout. conversely, a system that comes about as a series of fixes to problems will appear uncertain and erratic and make it difficult for drivers to predict where they can find parking to suit their needs.

Communicate Clearly The burden rests upon us to communicate to drivers how they can park effectively in Northampton. The process of communication begins with the design and continues through signage, policing, and technology. New smart meters can communicate with applications that show, in real time available spaces or can act in a predictive manner to help people plan visits. Communication is the final step

End Note

The City of Northampton is an inviting place, a place where people want to come to be together. Often, these invited people come by car. These people shop in our stores, eat in our restaurants, serve us our coffee, bake our bread they work and live here. You will see them, in their great multitude, crossing the street at Pleasant and Main on on warm Friday night, cheering on the Pride March and eating ice cream on the sloping grass below Osaka. These people are our guests. We're better for having them here.

Creating a better parking infrastructure primarily by making ours more useable, by coaxing people into the right choices is an important step in making Northampton the way we want it.