norwalk parking masterplan

A supplement to the Norwalk Connectivity Masterplan

December 2012

Prepared by Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
for: The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency
and the Norwalk Parking Authority

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For updates and additional information, go to www.connectnorwalk.com .

Norwalk Parking Master Plan

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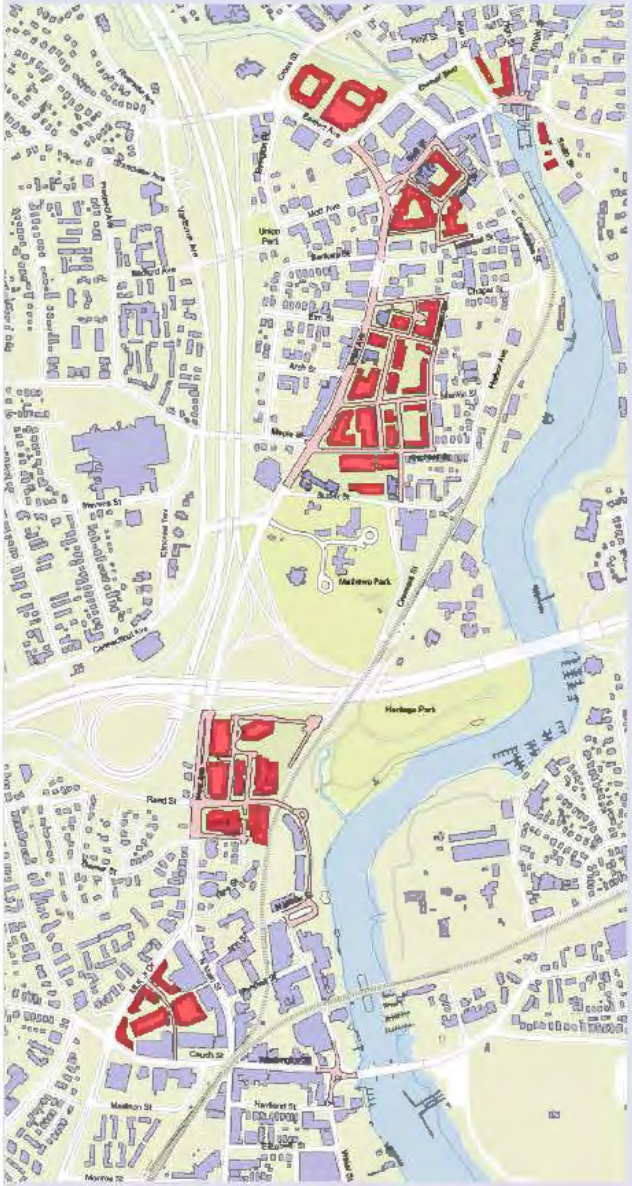
introduction

Norwalk has embarked on a major redevelopment agenda that, when finally implemented, will significantly increase the number of cars, and the space necessary to park them, in its downtown corridor. The forecasted increases in road congestion and the use of valuable developable land for parking is a major challenge to the original, high-density, pedestrian-oriented vision for Downtown Norwalk.

Advancing Norwalk's economic development will require additional density, which will only be manageable with higher transit utilization along with improved conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians. Under these conditions the optimum amount of parking in the downtown will most likely be different than traditionally envisioned and currently required under existing zoning regulations. As Norwalk's developers can attest, financing and building parking is a major hurdle that requires the devotion of significant land and financial resources. Moving forward, the construction of parking will increasingly come at the expense of land that could be better dedicated to additional housing, office, or retail space. In short, Norwalk is approaching a point in its urban form where parking and the construction of parking is getting in the way of the city's overall development plan and the creation of a vibrant pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment.

The study of parking conditions in Downtown Norwalk and the resulting Parking Master Plan serves as an addendum to the Downtown Norwalk Connectivity Plan. Parking is an essential component of Connectivity because oversupply of parking:

- Is expensive
- Increases road congestion
- Uses valuable developable land
- Challenges the high density, pedestrian-oriented vision of the City



Downtown Norwalk's Redevelopment Plan

- Discourages mode shift
- Is harmful to the environment
- Threatens quality of life

In many ways, parking is 'the' critical link between transportation and land use, and its development and management must be carefully planned and programmed if Connectivity goals are to be realized. The three core goals that guided the development of the Connectivity Plan are as follows:

1. Develop a better & more efficient dynamic between traffic, transit, and parking
2. Facilitate safer bicycling in the downtown core
3. Improve the pedestrian experience, wayfinding, and heritage tourism

Complete Street concept for West Avenue (Norwalk Connectivity Study)

downtown parking conditions

Great cities are not often remembered for their abundant parking supply; however, the construction of more parking spaces is almost always a high priority among decision makers. In many places, parking standards (i.e. parking ratios prescribed by zoning) are based purely on the type and size of the development, and they do not account for the complexity of downtowns in terms of land use, types of users, transit availability, density, form, economics, environmental constraints, and community goals. Most parking standards assume that all parking is free to the user and that alternatives to driving are limited; which has the unintended consequence of relating economic growth to growth in automobile trips.

The more downtown is broken up and interspersed with parking lots and garages, the duller and deader it becomes ... and there is nothing more repellent than a dead downtown.

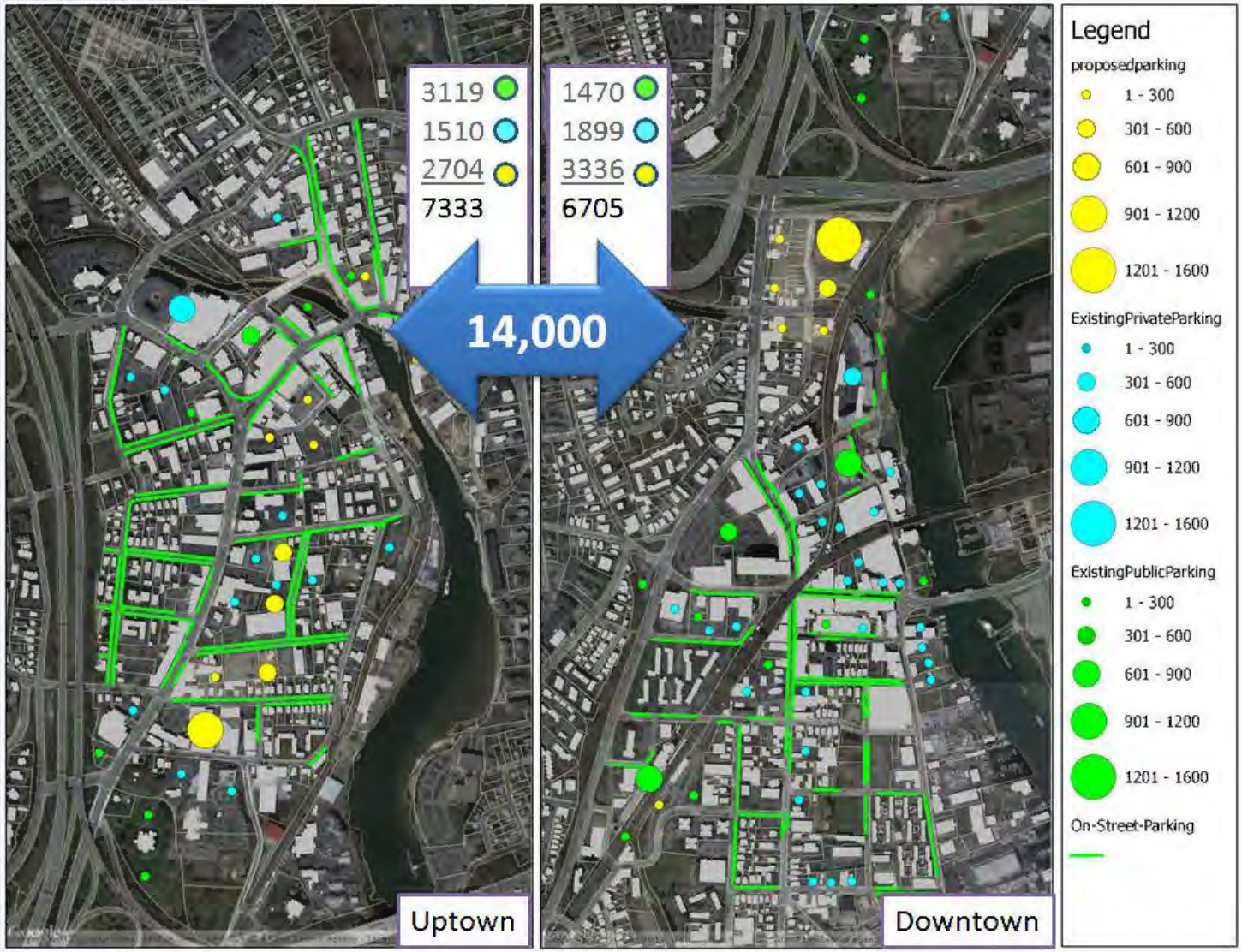
– Author and urban planner Jane Jacobs, 1961

Supply and Demand

For the purposes of this study, Norwalk's Downtown was assessed by geographic subarea - Uptown (north of I-95) and Downtown (south of I-95). A parking analysis conducted in the spring of 2012 concluded that, overall, the supply of parking spaces in both the Uptown and Downtown areas is in excess of current demand. This is most prevalent within off-street parking supply. Some additional parking capacity exists among on-street spaces, but this is mostly along streets that are at the fringes of the most popular destinations. The analysis recognized that a number of properties in both the uptown and downtown areas have considerable vacancies and therefore parking utilization would likely be greater if all buildings were fully occupied. Still, it is clear that some parking locations are preferred over others and a parking surplus exists. A major objective of this study was to understand why parking is used the way it is and to identify solutions to maximize its use so that Downtown Norwalk maintains enough parking to satisfy its development goals, without overbuilding parking and undermining the City's multimodal transportation and community livability goals.

Maritime Garage in South Norwalk

The figure below illustrates the mix of public, private/commercial, and proposed parking supply in Downtown Norwalk. Existing public parking supply includes 3,119 spaces Downtown and 1,470 spaces Uptown. The largest garages are the Yankee Doodle Garage, The Maritime Garage, and the South Norwalk Train Station Garage. Additionally there are about 1,200 commercial spaces available in which the private owners of the parking set the rates.



It is notable that there are 2,186 privately owned parking spaces in the study area dedicated to a specific business. It is assumed that overall the users of these businesses do not occupy public parking spaces. The opportunity to better utilize these spaces is difficult to assess as the rate of occupancy is unknown. If there is a change in use at any one of these businesses, the owner may be required, under zoning, to provide more spaces to serve the new use. Assuming that a long-standing use has only those spaces it currently needs, a need for more spaces may be sought in the public supply. Conversely, if some of these private lots are underutilized, they present an opportunity for a public-private partnership for creation of additional public spaces. While these opportunities exist, the current zoning for parking and public parking management do not fully support taking advantage of them.

Proposed new parking represents the greatest share of the total future supply, and is the segment of the overall supply that can be most significantly influenced by the recommendations in this plan. Prior to the economic downturn, over 6,000 new parking spaces were being proposed to accompany new development initiatives in the Downtown. Adding these new spaces to existing supply results in an aggregate parking supply of about 14,000 spaces, all in an area of less than 1 square mile.

Existing Parking Management Practices

Nobody likes to pay for parking, and some people will even ascribe the economic ailments of downtowns to overpriced parking, or overzealous enforcement. But parking costs money to provide, and therefore the providers must collect money to build and maintain it. If parking is not paid for at the meter (by the user) it will be collected through taxes (from local taxpayers), or through some combination of the two.

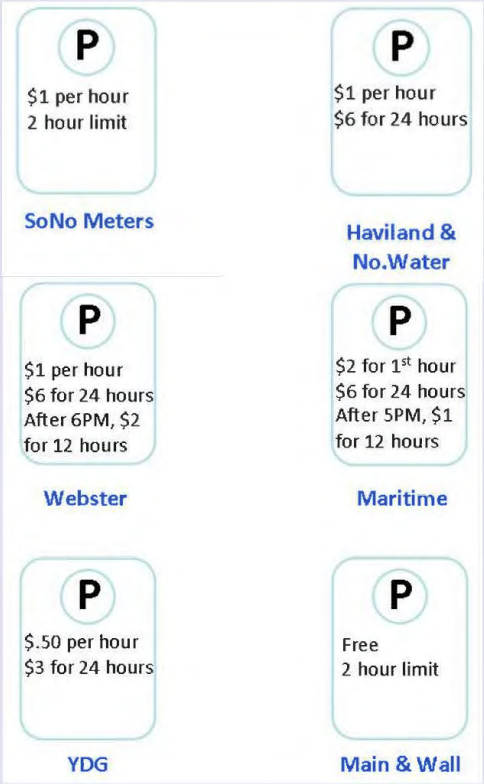
Discussions among policy makers about parking in downtown Norwalk often turn to the confusing array of rate structures that the user is confronted with when considering their parking options. In Norwalk's seven major parking facilities, there are five unique rate structures. Whether or not there is an advantage to maintaining individualized rate structures for each parking facility, and (if

"Parking is the single biggest land use in any city. It's kind of like dark matter in the universe, we know it's there, but we don't have any idea how much there is."

Donald Shoup, Urban Planning professor at UCLA

NORWALK PARKING AUTHORITY

so) whether or not the advantages outweigh the confusion that results for the uninitiated user, are both questions that merit further investigation.



Downtown parking facilities' current rates structures

The Norwalk Parking Authority does not follow best practices when it comes to on-street vs. off-street pricing. Off-street spaces are just as (or even more) expensive than the on-street spaces for the first hour; offering little or no financial incentive for their use, nor any encouragement to turn over the on-street spaces. The Norwalk Parking Authority's (NPA) own Management Plan recommends against such practices, and representatives of the parking authority state that the NPA is working gradually toward implementing their plan's recommendation in this area. The City should hold the Authority accountable in this regard.

Although they are often the first to resist charging more at the meters (in the name of their customers), local businesses have the most to gain from achieving higher turnover in on-street spaces. For some visitors and customers of Downtown Norwalk, the lack of an on-street space can be a deterrent; therefore, there needs to be enough space turnover to result in greater on-street parking availability. Short-duration trips are ideally suited to the convenience of on-street parking and on-street space turnover is achieved through meter pricing and/or enforcement, and businesses get access to more customers.

The conundrum of enforcement is that it is a necessary evil: nobody likes it, but, without it, the system cannot operate as-designed, or operate at all if flouting the rules becomes the norm. As discussed above, with some parking spaces, turnover is important for maximizing customers' access to businesses. If, for example, parkers are allowed to occupy their spaces all day without an effective penalty, the businesses lose the customers who otherwise would have utilized that space to patronize their shops and restaurants. In many cases, it is the employees of the very businesses requesting the need for more convenient parking who are consuming these valuable spaces. It is, therefore, not a question of whether, but how, to enforce.

Charge for Parking – a major policy step for Glendale, California

LATE PAYMENT PENALTY FINES

Paying or appealing your ticket on time is important. Penalties are imposed for fines not paid promptly, pursuant to section 38-22 of the Norwalk Code as

Norwalk collects payments online.

future development impacts

Waypointe

Avalon

95/7

Information about prospective development was drawn from the Northeast Economic and Real Estate Market Trends report (Johnson Controls Inc., June, 2011) [JCI Report] and through discussion with the City of Norwalk Redevelopment Agency. The intent was to apply a realistic projection of future development in the study area to gain an understanding of future parking demand, assuming no changes in City parking regulations or management.

As previously shown, the four City redevelopment areas of Wall Street, West Avenue, Reed-Putnam, and South Norwalk each have plans that indicate programmed land uses when fully built. Based on recent market trends resulting from the economic recession, the JCI report predicted a more modest level of development for the near-term. JCI evaluated the market demand for the proposed land uses and drew conclusions about what could be successfully built and profitably leased by the year 2015. The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, based on its expertise with Norwalk's economic environment, recommended a year 2020 scenario of probable development that includes 2,000 additional residential units, 400,000 square feet of retail and entertainment, and 300,000 square feet of office or institutional space.

The City of Norwalk has both standard language for parking in its zoning regulations and a number of flexible zoning provisions. The standard language includes a table of uses with associated minimum parking spaces required. The flexible parking provisions most notably allow for shared parking under certain conditions and allow use of public/municipal spaces to meet demand in some locales. For the four redevelopment projects considered in this parking study, the following parking ratios and shared-parking reductions were applied:

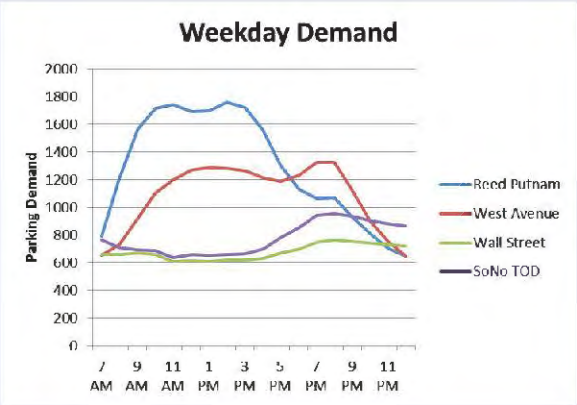
- Residential = Multifamily - 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit for over 50 units, and for 1 bedroom apartments. Otherwise, 2 spaces per unit. This study assumed 1.75 spaces per unit as the unit types are unknown at this time.

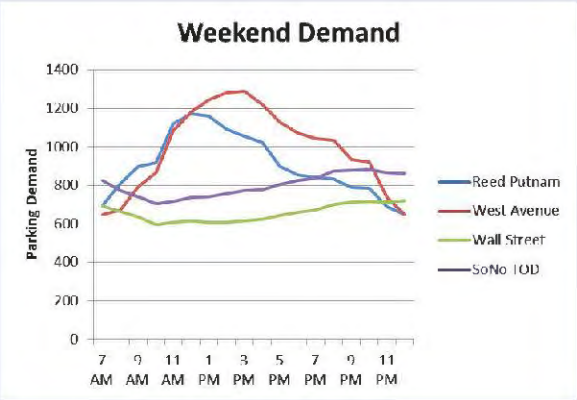
- Office = 1 space per 334 Square Feet - non-medical office
- Retail = 1 space per 200 SF
- Up to 50% shared use reduction for buildings (on same property and under same ownership) within 600' of each other and where major uses of those buildings occur during the weekend or night time and the adjacent use peaks during opposite time periods (e.g. weekend –vs- weekday, daylight –vs- nighttime)

The table on the next page lists the nominal parking requirement under zoning based on the straight ratios in the code. The table also shows the parking requirement under an ideal application of the code's shared parking provision.

Parking is always a contentious issue and most cities have taken the path of least resistance - facilitating a relentless increase in parking. Ironically, complaints that there is never enough parking seems to grow in direct proportion to the amount of parking supplied.

– Norman Garrick and Christopher McCahill, Lessons From Zurich's Parking Revolution





Time-of-day parking demand models can indicate where and when parking can be most effectively shared. Norwalk does not currently use such a model.

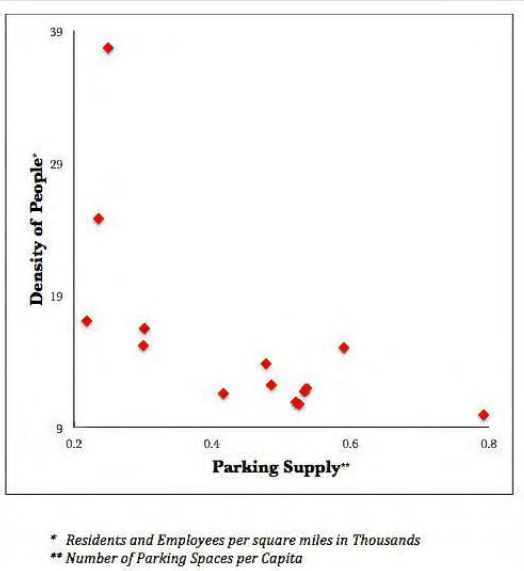
Redevelopment Area	Square Footage/ Units	Parking Required Under Zoning	Parking Required with Maximum Allowable Shared Parking Reductions
Reed-Putnam - 95/7			
Residential	450 units	788	197
Retail/Entertainment	120,000 s.f.	450	450
Office/Institutional	240,000 s.f.	719	503
TOTAL		1,956	1,150
Wall Street			
Residential	500 units	875	710
Retail/Entertainment	20,000 s.f.	75	75
Office/Institutional	30,000 s.f.	90	90
TOTAL		1040	875
West Avenue			
Residential	450 units	788	491
Retail/Entertainment	220,000 s.f.	825	825
Office/Institutional	30,000 s.f.	90	90
TOTAL		1,702	1,406
SoNo TOD			
Residential	600 units	1,050	900
Retail/Entertainment	40,000 s.f.	150	150
Office/Institutional	0 s.f.	0	0
TOTAL		1,200	1,050
GRAND TOTAL		5,898	4,481

New Parking Required under Existing Norwalk Zoning Regulations for Year 2020

Determining the 'right' amount of parking in Downtown Norwalk should start with the assumption that parking is most effectively shared in an urban environment. If one accepts this premise, then the availability of existing public parking spaces should be considered available to meet parking demand. Given that public parking is generally underutilized in the Downtown, the amount of new parking necessary to support Norwalk's redevelopment efforts could, in part, be satisfied by available existing supply.

How best should this be accomplished? What are the disadvantages? Are there other ways to reduce parking demand? Will progressive parking policies scare away a prospective developer? Answering questions such as these involves investigating successes and failures from other places through research about national Best Practices, and reaching out to Stakeholders in Downtown Norwalk's future for advice on the development of an appropriate parking strategy.

national best practices



Source: Garrick and McCahill

Some cities are pioneers in developing new parking policy. Others are reluctant to make changes until a preponderance of evidence supports any proposed change in policy. Both trailblazers and defenders of the status quo can benefit from the experiences of other cities that have tried or considered similar ideas. Research conducted for this study included new trends and best practices in parking – both in terms of policy and design. Where possible, documentation of the impacts of applying those best practices on parking demand was sought.

Research performed at the University of Connecticut found that cities with higher levels of automobile use generally supply more parking, as would be expected. But what is unexpected is the degree to which these auto-oriented cities also have a much lower density of what matters in to vibrant cities; residents and jobs (see the figure below). American cities in the study with smaller numbers of parking spaces have two to four times more people per square mile than cities which have more parking supply. This seems to have a lot to do with the amount of space that is needed for parking. In other words, space used for parking is simply not available for more productive uses.

Nationally, the discussion on parking policy reform revolves around removing parking minimums. It is argued that parking requirements prevent infill redevelopment on small lots, where fitting both a new building and the required parking is difficult and expensive. Additionally, parking requirements prevent new uses for many older buildings that lack the parking spaces required for the new uses.

Parking requirements primarily exist to prevent parking spillover onto local streets, and to reduce unnecessary traffic circulation. Minimums that exist in most zoning ordinances only consider the type of use and the square footage when setting parking requirements. The policy often ignores many contextual elements that can influence the need for parking, such as density of the surrounding area, availability of transit, quality of the pedestrian environment, and area

demographics, to mention a few. Current thinking on the topic is often based on the assumption that private property owners will do a better job estimating their parking demand. This is because property owners are motivated to make sure their customers are served without providing so much parking that the development or business becomes unaffordable.

Some cities are imposing parking maximums, which restricts the amount of parking a development can provide. This strategy works best in urban environments that are trying to reduce the amount of automobile travel and encourage shifts to alternate modes of transportation. When cities desire to maximize space for development opportunities, as Downtown Norwalk does, parking maximums place limits on the use of that space for parking.

The research is clear that if parking maximums are used and parking minimums are eliminated, or even reduced, then supportive programs or policies must be put in-place to manage spillover onto local streets and private lots. Cities must remain nimble and flexible to respond to unique situations, and work collaboratively with property owners to find ways to reduce parking demand over time.

A search of newspaper articles about minimum parking requirements found 129 reports of cities that have removed off-street parking requirements in their downtowns since 2005. Although newspaper articles do not represent what all cities are doing, the articles include many comments on why cities are beginning to change their policies. Some of the reasons given for removing parking requirements are "to promote the creation of downtown apartments" (Greenfield, Massachusetts), "to see more affordable housing" (Miami), "to meet the needs of smaller businesses" (Muskegon, Michigan), "to give business owners more flexibility while creating a vibrant downtown" (Sandpoint, Idaho), and "to prevent ugly, auto-oriented townhouses" (Seattle).

– Donald Shoup, 'Yes, Parking Reform is Possible'

stakeholder outreach

Parking Plan Advisory Committee

1 Bryan Meek
2 Mike Greene
3 Buckley Ryayn
4 Mike McGuire
5 Bill Finger
6 Steve Semaya
7 Torgny Astrom
8 John Igneri
9 Bruce Beinfield
10 Ed Musante
11 Kathryn Hebert
12 Tim Sheehan
13 Ben Peck
14 Stephanie Pellatier
Munro Johnson, staff

The Norwalk Redevelopment Agency sought input from a variety of stakeholders and established a Parking Advisory Committee (PAC) to provide guidance on this study. The PAC met several times over the course of the study. In addition, the NRA hosted a Parking Symposium on Tuesday March 27, 2012. A panel discussion included both public and private perspectives on parking production and a discussion on how lender and tenant parking demands can exceed what zoning regulations require, or what a community may perceive as necessary. Finally, several members of Norwalk's development community were sent an online survey to explore their receptiveness to a variety of proposed parking strategies. The result of all of these engagement activities was steady refinement to the plan's development, recognizing the unique characteristics and applicability to Downtown Norwalk.

Parking Advisory Committee Directives

Following the initial supply and demand analysis of the study, the PAC offered the following comments and direction to the study team on the development of the parking plan:

- Inventory: At a district level (i.e., SoNo and Wall Street), demand has not kept pace with supply.
- Utilization: Perceived 'Supply' problem is really a utilization problem; both districts are challenged to draw users to their underutilized parking resources.
- Economics: A high-volume, high-cost parking approach in a low-rent environment is the most financially fraught of all possible transportation solutions for a downtown.
- Production: In downtown areas, ratio-based zoning is, at best, a starting place from which a community should factor in context-specific considerations. "How urban" is one such consideration.

- Management: Paid public parking remains a controversial public policy of the City's. There is a perception that the poor business climate downtown is significantly attributable to this policy and some people would like to revert to taxpayer-supported public parking.

- Market: Downtown Norwalk is drawing less out-of-towners. Retail and restaurants are relying more and more upon locals and people already within the neighborhood (as residents or workers).

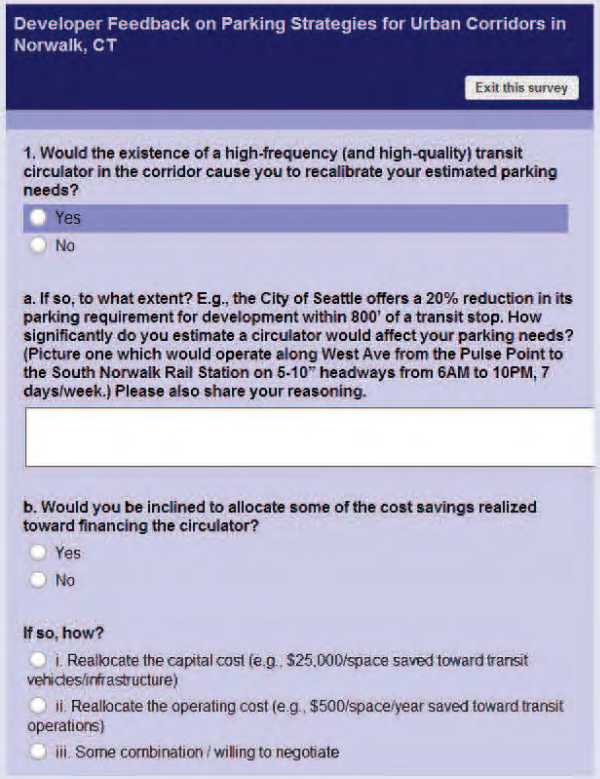
Developer Survey

Since a major component of this plan includes the regulation of new parking supply, it was imperative that Norwalk's developers be interviewed. An online survey was designed using Survey Monkey, and was conducted during the period of Friday, May 11, 2012 to Friday, May 18, 2012. All total, five (5) responses were received from area developers. The paragraphs below highlight some of the key survey responses:

- A majority of the surveyed developers believe that a high-frequency/high-quality transit circulator would lower their parking requirements.

- A majority of respondents believe that a car-sharing program would lessen the demand for cars and parking in the downtown area and said that they would consider providing spaces in their developments for a car-sharing program.

- 60% of respondents believe that increased bicycling within Downtown would reduce the demand for cars and parking.


Developer Feedback on Parking Strategies for Urban Corridors in Norwalk, CT

Exit this survey

1. Would the existence of a high-frequency (and high-quality) transit circulator in the corridor cause you to recalibrate your estimated parking needs?

- Yes
- No

a. If so, to what extent? E.g., the City of Seattle offers a 20% reduction in its parking requirement for development within 800' of a transit stop. How significantly do you estimate a circulator would affect your parking needs? (Picture one which would operate along West Ave from the Pulse Point to the South Norwalk Rail Station on 5-10" headways from 6AM to 10PM, 7 days/week.) Please also share your reasoning.

b. Would you be inclined to allocate some of the cost savings realized toward financing the circulator?

- Yes
- No

If so, how?

- i. Reallocate the capital cost (e.g., $25,000/space saved toward transit vehicles/infrastructure)
- ii. Reallocate the operating cost (e.g., $500/space/year saved toward transit operations)
- iii. Some combination / willing to negotiate

Sample page from Survey Monkey

Demographic and urban development trends show shifts of decreasing demand for car ownership and usership. With very specifically planned retail mixes – and combined with other non-retail uses – some shared use and parking reduction may be possible, but it's difficult. Zip cars have been very successful in Portland. Some parking reduction strategies depend on the specific user. Keane Shoes – whose whole mission statement is about walking – will be amenable to less parking, whereas a typical Connecticut hedge fund will demand the standard minimum ratios.

-Clayton Fowler, CEO of Spinnaker Real Estate Partners speaking at the Norwalk Parking Symposium

- 80% of respondents stated that they would consider using another ample parking supply, if it was available within 1,000 feet of their development.
- 50% of respondents replied that they would consider unbundling parking costs from the sale of residential units.
- 50% of respondents stated that parking maximums could kill a project and would continue to be a problem even with the presence of a high-quality transit circulator and unbundling.
- Respondents think the developers in Norwalk are pretty smart and lessening the minimum amount of parking or providing maximums would allow the developers to determine the amount of spaces to make their projects viable. No developer wants to undersupply parking for their project therefore setting it up to fail. Give the developers some flexibility.
- Respondents also believe the current levels of parking with the zoning regulations should be reduced and the amount of sharing allowed should be increased. They also believe the on-street parking spaces in front of buildings should be counted towards meeting parking demand. Respondents feel that the Cityneeds new development not more empty parking. Construction of new municipal parking lots or garages should result in credits to reduce zoning requirements further.

downtown norwalk parking master plan

Major policy reform requires a plan that has been vetted through consultation with stakeholders, has recommendations that are implementable over both near- and long-term timeframes, and is rooted by a common desire and the political will to achieve a stated set of goals. This Downtown Parking Master Plan satisfies these requirements. Both public agency and private development stakeholders have agreed that the recommendations presented on the following pages could work in Downtown Norwalk, provided they are introduced in an incremental fashion, evaluated routinely for effectiveness, and maintain enough flexibility to keep Downtown Norwalk attractive to development. The recommendations are based on best practices from around the country and carefully tailored to the specific conditions of Downtown Norwalk. Furthermore, the recommendations are phased to occur in increments coinciding with the opening of major redevelopment projects and transportation initiatives adopted by the City of Norwalk in the Connectivity Plan. Major plan elements are grouped as follows:

- Recommendation 1: Link Parking Management to Better Data
- Recommendation 2: Improve Utilization of Existing Parking Assets
- Recommendation 3: Zoning Reform – Minimums to Maximums
- Recommendation 4: Supportive Strategies

There is a growing constituency in Norwalk that either attributes Downtown's economic malaise to paid parking, and/or believes that "free parking" would spark a comeback, or for various other reasons favors a return to "free parking" in downtown Norwalk. For the following reasons, this plan does not recommend that course of action:

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." - Albert Einstein

Washington Street, South Norwalk

1. There is little to no research to suggest any link between paid parking in downtown Norwalk and the declining economic fortunes of its businesses; meanwhile, a significant body of professional literature and a growing consensus among professionals suggests the opposite, i.e., that a well-managed and market-based pricing system can stimulate area businesses by increasing access. The cost of parking in Norwalk's downtown should be commensurate with the customers' sense of the experience offered by the district's attractions.

2. The costs to build and maintain parking are not insignificant and charging for those costs at the point of service delivery (i.e., by charging the user), rather than charging the general Norwalk taxpayer, is arguably the most fair and efficient way of recouping the costs.

3. A shift by the city's parking authority away from a user-fee-supported model to a taxpayer-supported model would mean either an increase in Norwalk taxpayer bills or a decrease in other city services.

Still, this plan cannot turn a blind eye to the larger economic challenges faced by downtown businesses. For Downtown Norwalk, an incremental approach to parking reform seems to be the most prudent path to success. Based on guidance from the PAC and feedback from area stakeholders, the following strategies are recommended to constitute a new public policy on parking in Downtown Norwalk.

In our research on parking in American cities, we had to labor for weeks over aerial photographs and other records to compile the data for each of the cities in our study. This lack of basic information means that cities are operating blind when they try to understand the long-term impact of parking policy on the city as a whole or develop more effective policies.

– Garrick and McCahill

Recommendation 1: Link Parking Management to Better Data

Good policy depends upon good information, and Norwalk would benefit from better data collection and analysis of its infrastructure in order to inform policy and operational decisions. Effective parking management requires understanding stakeholders' needs, be those neighborhood residents, businesses, visitors, or parkers themselves. Doing this well is both important and difficult. Recommended actions/strategies are presented on the following pages.

Near term (1-2 years)

Conduct customer survey

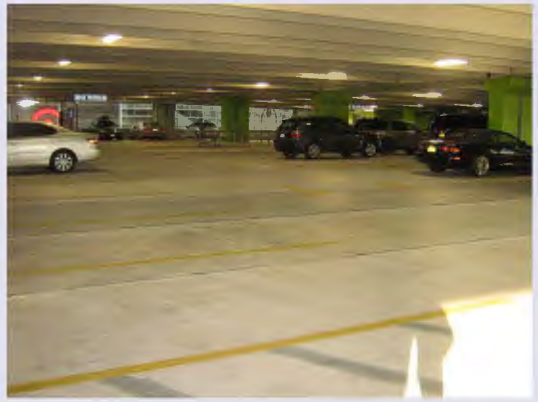
In an effort to gauge customer needs, the NPA and the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency recently conducted online surveys to better understand how customers are using the public parking and their overall satisfaction with services. It is recommended that the NPA budget for and contract a professionally-prepared and administered customer survey that achieves a statistically-significant response. This data should be updated periodically to capture changing conditions .

Periodic peer community review

Conduct periodic reviews of parking policies in municipalities/districts with which Downtown Norwalk businesses compete for customers. This information will help policy makers in Norwalk understand the competitive marketplace they are in and allow them to make policy changes to stay current and competitive in that market.

Occupancy measurement

Integrate parking occupancy measurement into the NPA's day-to-day data collection procedures and regular operations reports. Periodically, the NRA should monitor building vacancy to factor that into occupancy trends. Both agencies should ensure this information is shared with the Zoning Commission as it can inform their decision-making on development proposals.



Underutilized parking at East River Plaza, NYC. Photo credit: Kyle Gebhart, Rutgers MCRP Candidate

Neither planners nor politicians seem to realize that the parking requirements (and the free parking they produce) accelerate sprawl. Cars have replaced people as zoning's real concern, and free parking has become the arbiter of urban form, with serious consequences far beyond parking itself.

- Donald Shoup, Urban Planning professor at UCLA

Redwood City, CA (population 78,000) has municipal code that allows for periodic adjustment of downtown meter rates based upon an 85% target utilization objective. An annual parking study is performed to advise the parking authority on adjusting rates up or down by $0.25 in order to achieve that objective.

Recommendation 2: Improve Utilization of Existing Parking Assets

Adopt performance pricing of public parking assets; that is, allow the market to establish parking rates based on the basic laws of supply and demand. In essence, the most convenient spaces demand a premium price. This concept removes the politics from rate setting. Simply put, the idea works like this: the NPA sets the performance pricing policy to charge the lowest prices possible without creating a parking shortage. This means that the city will monitor, and adjust as necessary, rates across its entire inventory of parking spaces until a target demand equilibrium is met. For example, the NPA can decide that a goal is to achieve 85% parking utilization across all public spaces. Through periodic data collection and observation, adjustments to on- and off-street parking rates are brought up or down to maintain an optimal utilization balance and retain just enough additional parking capacity so that spaces are always available. Doing this will allow for the removal of time restrictions for certain spaces and revenues can be directed toward additional services such as facility or streetscape improvements. An incremental approach to performance pricing in Downtown Norwalk is as follows:

Near term (1-2 years)

Expand use of meters for premium curbside spaces

For curbside spaces, expand the use of meters, or ideally pay stations, that accept credit and debit cards. It is recommended that the NPA include the capital cost of the paystations in their annual budget. Locations to expand payment system include:

- All on-street parking north of I-95
- Putnam Avenue, Monroe Street, Elizabeth Street, Raymond Street, Day Street, Water Street, Henry Street, Concord Street, Chestnut Street

Survey downtown merchants on their interest in implementing a stored-value card system such as the Parcxmart system used in New Haven and Bridgeport.

Charge for all on-street parking

Adopt a rate-structure policy that charges more for on-street spaces than for off-street spaces. No on-street parking in Downtown Norwalk should be free. Start with lower rates in remote locations and higher rates in the busiest locations. Conceptually, this might look something like this, however actual rates should be confirmed with the NPA:

- Highest rates (e.g. $1.50/hr) along West Avenue, Belden Avenue, Wall Street, Academy Street, Washington Avenue, N. Main Street, and Haviland Street
- Median rates (e.g. $1.00/hr) along all east-west streets from Mott Avenue to Orchard Street, Ann Street, Marshall Street, Madison Street, Monroe Street, Elizabeth Street, and S. Main Street
- Lowest rates (e.g. $0.50/hr) along Main Street, High Street, Raymond Street, Henry Street, Chestnut Street, Concord Street, Day Street, and Water Street

Implement valet parking service

Valet parking can assist with more efficient utilization of parking because valets can usually park cars more closely together than regular drivers, and the cars can be 'stacked' which allows much higher use of a given lot or garage. Some valet services may even be able to park cars at more remote parking locations than a casual driver may be inclined to use.

Designate the following locations for valet parking operations:

- Washington Street / South Main Street
- Haviland Street / Water Street
- Wall Street / Main Street

Adjacent public parking facilities should reserve the most readily accessible spaces for valet service, as well as sufficient on-street spaces for vehicle queuing after 5 PM.

Downtown Norwalk

Old Pasadena provided streetscape and alley improvements to provide clean, safe and friendly linkages between the garages destinations.

Over $500 million in private investment followed.

Bike coral in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Mid term (3-6 years)

Improve pedestrian connections around parking

For existing lots and garages, improve the pedestrian environment to major destinations (per the Connectivity Plan). Some of the reluctance to using public off-street parking is attributed to a poor pedestrian experience between the parking resource and the person's ultimate destination. Narrow and unclean sidewalks, poorly lit walkways, and difficult street crossings are some of the deterrants to parking and walking. Targeted streetscape improvements should be implemented around the NPA's most significant parking resources. Where practical, provide short-term spaces on the lower levels of above-ground garages (or upper levels of underground structures). Locations include:

- Yankee Doodle Garage
- Main Street Lot
- Wall Street Lot
- Maritime Garage
- Webster Lot
- SoNo RR Station Garage

Establish bike corals

Reclaim and repurpose individual on-street spaces for bike corrals or outdoor dining such as has become popular in cities around the country. Locations include:

- Wall Street
- Washington Avenue

Strategic placement of on-street car-share spaces

If and when car-sharing programs are expanded in Downtown Norwalk, the NPA should convert several on-street spaces in strategic locations to encourage and promote the use of the program.

Adopt market-rate pricing policy

Downtown Norwalk does not currently offer an experience that is commensurate with the existing cost and inconvenience of parking. With increased density and a well-connected transportation system visitors will eventually accept – in fact they will come to expect – the fact that paid parking is a worthwhile cost for the experience of a vibrant urban district. To help make this happen, parking costs should be set based on market rates. These are rates that the free market determines to be optimal based on the principles of supply and demand.

Implementing a market-rate pricing strategy will be challenging, but certainly possible, for Downtown Norwalk. The Norwalk Parking Authority is required to be financially self-sustaining by a city ordinance that establishes the agency as an enterprise fund. This means that the agency must collect revenues to fund operations and cannot currently be financed by taxes. This presents a challenge because under current conditions, the market may dictate rates that are lower than what the NPA needs to cover their costs.

The goal of this strategy is to maintain target equilibrium of 85% occupancy through regular adjustments to the parking rate schedule. As soon as feasible, the NPA should lower rates at facilities where occupancy is consistently below 70%. These are primarily the Yankee Doodle Garage, Maritime Garage, and Webster Lot. Conversely, facilities (including curbside spaces) with occupancies greater than 85% should have rate increases until the target occupancy is achieved. Charging more for on-street spaces will help reduce the cost of parking in other off-street facilities; however, if this is not enough to close the NPA's funding gap then the City should consider subsidizing some of the cost of parking operations. If this becomes necessary, the City will need to revise the 2002 enterprise zone ordinance to allow the NPA to supplement its traditional revenue collection mechanisms through tax levies or other funding sources.

Hoboken, NJ devotes on-street spaces near intersections to shared vehicles. The idea is to provide intuitive transportation choices so that owning a car becomes less desirable.

"I believe the current levels of parking with the zoning regulations should be reduced and the amount of sharing allowed should be increased. I also believe the on street parking spaces should be counted in front of buildings. We need new development not more empty parking. Construction of new municipal parking lots or garages should result in credits to reduce zoning requirements further."

- Response from developer survey

Recommendation 3: Zoning Reform – Minimums to Maximums

Contemporary ratio-based zoning requirements for parking have evolved primarily based on suburban parking conditions. They assume that the automobile will be the primary way patrons access a business. In downtown areas, ratio-based zoning is a rough approximation of parking demand and typically does not consider context-specific adjustments. "Urban context" should be a key factor in tailoring parking requirements to an urban condition. Norwalk is urbanizing and existing zoning practices that are based on suburban models have severed the link between the cost of providing a parking space and the price that drivers are willing to pay for it. This is because providing parking for every trip made is expensive, and the cost of providing such parking must be recovered by user fees, taxes, or some combination of the two.

As Downtown Norwalk continues to become more urban in context, and land becomes scarcer, the zoning tools of the past must be replaced by a new policy that maximizes development potential and supports the initiatives in the City's Connectivity Plan. Zoning reform requires a consistent commitment by a municipality to review and revise code as conditions 'on the ground' warrant. As such, this plan recommends taking an incremental approach to enacting changes. An incremental approach to such zoning reform is as follows:

Near term (1-2 years)

Lower existing parking minimums

Minimum parking requirements sometimes prevent infill redevelopment on small lots, where fitting both a new building and the required parking is difficult and expensive. They also can prevent new uses for many older buildings that lack the parking spaces required for the new uses. They create a bureaucratic process based on an in-exact and often flawed science. Historically, minimums have led to the over-supply of parking in cities. They are also present a financial challenge to developers trying to make their projects profitable. The following is recommended:

- Lower residential parking ratios to 1 space per dwelling unit for over 50 units and for 1 bedroom apartments. Otherwise, 1.5 spaces per unit.

- Commercial: reduce existing minimums by 25%
- Office: reduce existing minimums by 25%
- Allow existing shared-parking reductions to be applied to lower minimum ratios
- Encourage developers to unbundle parking costs when selling or leasing residential space by granting variances on minimum parking requirements or other incentives
- Encourage developers to include parking as a separate line item on lease agreements for office space by granting variances on minimum parking requirements or other incentives

"I think the developers in Norwalk are pretty smart and lessening the minimum amount of parking or providing maximums would allow the developers to determine the amount of spaces to make their projects viable. No one wants to under park their project therefore setting it up to fail. Give us some flexibility."

- Response from developer survey

Mid term (3-6 years)

Phase out parking minimums

Without minimums, users and suppliers have more flexibility to navigate toward market-oriented solutions. Some advantages of eliminating minimums include:

- Developers won't have to pay to build parking they don't need
- Users will be able to satisfy their parking demand in whatever way the market provides (no 25-year legal instruments to share across ownerships)
- As other means of transportation gain popularity, space and resources that would otherwise have gone to parking can be redirected to more valuable development

"Unbundling parking is an essential first step towards getting people to understand the economic cost of parking and providing users with the opportunity to opt out of parking and make alternative travel decisions. WIthout unbundled parking, tenants experience parking as free, while transit costs them money."

- Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Francisco, CA

Long term (7-10 years)

Establish parking maximums

Downtown Norwalk is currently oversupplied with parking by several hundred spaces during most weekday, weekend and evening periods. This fact, along with certain bank lending conditions

that dictate parking supply development, presents some justification for converting existing parking minimums (excluding current shared provisions) to maximums. Based on feedback from stakeholders, a parking maximum policy, in order to be accepted, would need appropriate 'safety-nets' to give the city and developers reasonable flexibility to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. These could include:

- Allow waivers for on-site parking maximum requirements based on the city's discretion. Require a parking demand analysis for building parking above the maximum.
- Require that parking spaces beyond the maximum be open to general public use during time periods that do not conflict with the developer's peak demand.
- Require that parking spaces beyond the maximum be subject to additional fees that could help support enhanced transit or be transferred to a special services district responsible for improving the pedestrian environment around the parking. Examples include: sidewalk improvements, street furniture, landscaping, lighting, etc.
- Provide credits for including parking spaces for car and bike share programs.
- Offer incentives/tax breaks for property owners who demonstrate a sustained reduction in parking demand, and present 'parking conversion' strategies for converting portions of the underutilized supply to other productive uses – or public parking.
- Demonstrate how additional parking (above the maximum) can be adapted for reuse in the future for other purposes such as a more intensive transit-supportive use, car sharing spaces, or electric car charging stations for example.

Electric vehicle charging stations.
Photo: Contributed Photo / Norwalk Citizen

Recommendation 4: Supportive Strategies

In order for the preceding recommendations to be successful, a number of supportive strategies must be implemented. As new regulations are put into effect, the city will inevitably face new challenges so the various risks associated with a new parking policy need to be anticipated and

carefully planned for. Limiting the amount of new parking in the downtown requires an efficient and intuitive wayfinding system that directs customers to existing parking spaces, as well as to key downtown destinations once parked. Good wayfinding will help mitigate the practice of visitors using neighborhood streets and private parking spaces to fulfill their transient parking needs; however, a spillover management strategy is still necessary, along with firm (but friendly) enforcement.

Near term (1-2 years)

Wayfinding

People are often surprised to learn how much parking costs in downtown Norwalk, and that much of that parking has numerous available spaces at any given hour. As Norwalk continues to develop and become denser, the built environment will become one where parking lots and garages aren't always immediately visible or apparent from the street. Wayfinding signage is a recommendation under Norwalk's Connectivity Masterplan, and also an important strategy for the more effective utilization of public parking and traffic management in Norwalk's downtown.

The NPA is already installing some temporary signs directing people to public parking; ultimately, that content and more will need to be incorporated into the comprehensive wayfinding program under Connectivity.

First-time offender program

It is recommended that a smaller (or free) first-time ticket be issued before ramping up to current fees. Implement a 15-minute grace period beyond allotted time expiration and which the vehicle is subject to a citation. Also, a once-per-year amnesty for certain violations (small overstays in legal parking spaces) would gain a lot of goodwill, and be a policy the NPA could confidently point to as a concrete example of their responsiveness to public concern and business-friendly practices. This can be accomplished by keeping a database of violations and waiving the first offense when the individual logs onto the website or shows up at the parking authority to pay their fine.

Wayfinding examples from Connectivity Plan

Permit parking "hang-tag"

Source: Pittsburgh Cultural Trust Press Release

Human-touch communication

There is a perception in the community – justified or not – that policy decisions, rates, etc. are directed by the parking authority with little to no advance notice provided to affected parties. The NPA should supplement its emails and certified letters with other less officious, and more traditional measures of communication to let people know when things are about to change, the impacts, and their options. Parking enforcement officers should be trained to act as ambassadors to Downtown Norwalk and interface with the public in a friendly and courteous manner.

Mid term (3-6 years)

Residential permit program

On residential streets that abut high-density commercial development, implementing a residential parking permit district to restrict on-street parking use by anyone but permit holders is recommended. The general locations of these districts are as follows:

- Along Berkeley Street and Byington Place, and portions of intersecting E-W streets
- Along Harbor Ave and portions of Orchard, Merwin, Chapel and Leonard
- Along Henry Street and Chestnut Street

On streets with a mix of residential and non-residential use, require payment for on-street spaces for everyone except those with permits. Implement a 'monthly-limited' permit option for residents who use on-street parking and commute out of the downtown area during the day. This would be a lower-cost permit that would encourage better utilization of curbside space.

Implement 'find-a-space' technology

Finding a parking garage is no use if, upon arriving, you can't find an available parking space. Technology now exists that can let the driver know, via a smartphone application, which of a given

town's parking resources has how many spaces available and at what cost. Pittsburgh, PA's system (known as ParkPGH) even has a predictive parking algorithm that uses historical parking trends and current events to predict parking availability minutes to hours in the future. Norwalk should begin development of a similar application.

Transportation Demand Management

Encourage transportation demand management (TDM) strategies through the NRA's Design and Sustainability Review process. Businesses within the city's Enterprise Zone could receive additional incentives for implementing various TDM measures. Such measures could include:

- Offering flexible work schedules
- Offering telecommuting opportunities
- Providing transit subsidies
- Promoting and incentivizing ride sharing
- Offering preferential parking spaces for car and van pools
- Implementing guaranteed-ride-home programs
- Prioritizing parking spaces according to need (e.g. all-day parkers to remote locations)
- Implementing a parking 'cash-out' program
- Participating in bicycle-to-work programs
- Providing bicycle facilities such as lockers and showers

The following mapping illustrates the general locations of those parking strategies that require geographic specificity.

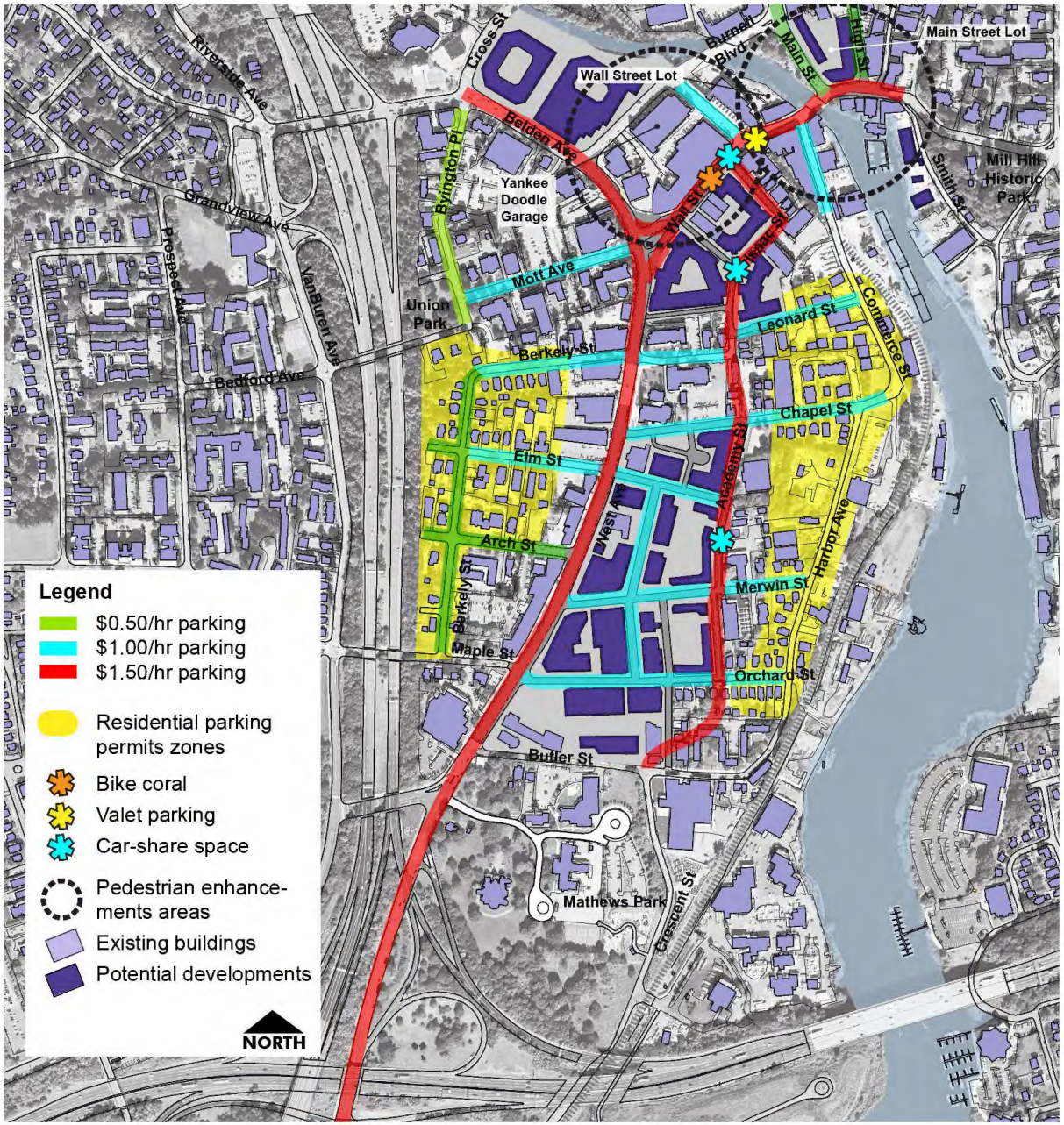
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency Sustainable Design Guidelines intend to meet the resource needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations, through efficient use and protection of natural resources and improvement of the urban environment.

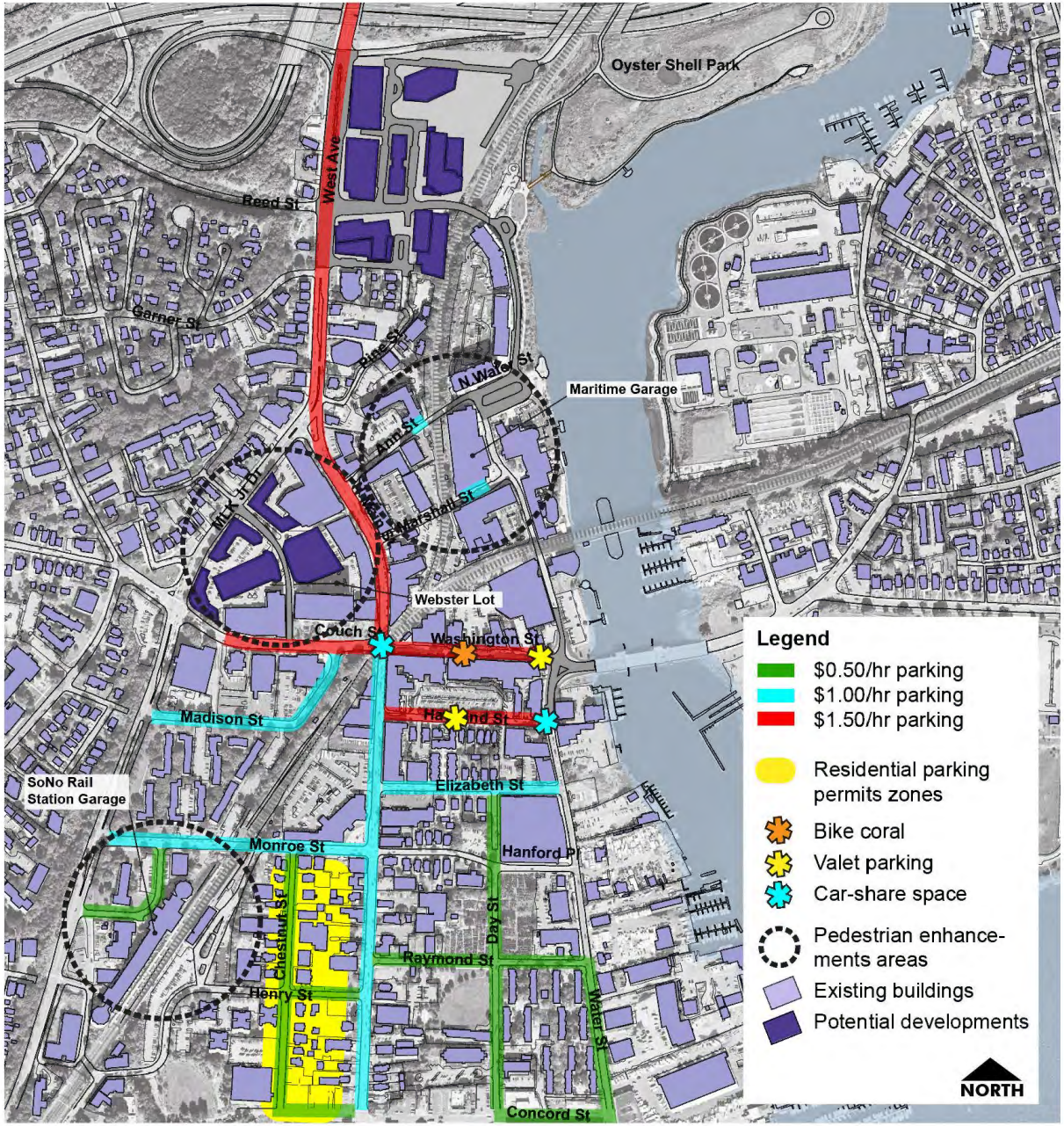
An example of bike lockers at the University of Texas
Photo credit: Megan Ann

Uptown

First and last, everyone is a pedestrian. Whether it's walking to your parked car, or walking from your parked car to your destination, eventually, even the most car-centric, walk-resistant persons find themselves on a sidewalk or crossing a street, walking alongside or across moving vehicles. So, everyone has an interest in a safe, comfortable walking environment.

Parking garage design, as well as the pedestrian linkages connecting it to surrounding destinations, can influence a person's decision to use off-street parking. Poor design can lead to concerns over safety, inconvenience for the user, negative aesthetic impact on the community, and ultimately poor utilization of the asset.





Downtown

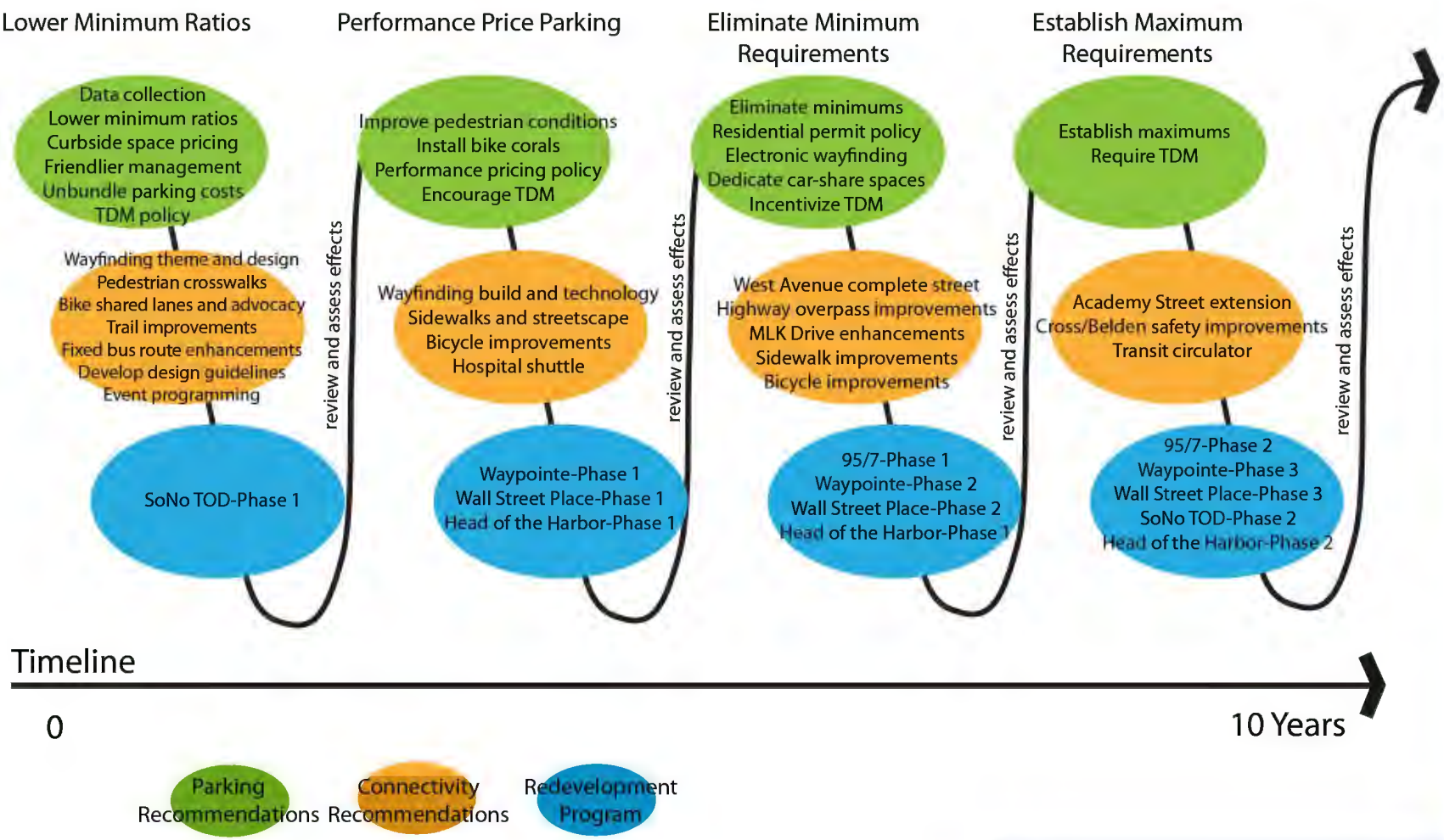
Reducing the perception that it is difficult to find customer parking downtown and increase use of available parking resources requires a parking pricing policy that encourages on-street space turnover and maximum utilization of existing off-street spaces.

Studies indicate that drivers cruising for parking account for 30% of traffic volume on downtown streets. Glendale, CA integrated an on-street and off-street pricing system that allows people to pay for parking spaces in the most convenient off-street spaces and to find short-term (90 minute) free parking in the surrounding garages. In the system's first year of operations, Glendale has seen significant improvement in parking efficiency downtown. The parking shortage perception has changed, more prime parking spaces are available near businesses, the once under-utilized parking structures have seen an increase in occupancy, and there is improved capability to manage operations and monitor financials.

Implementation

Advancing Norwalk's economic development will require significant additional density, which will only be possible with higher transit utilization, improved conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, and a policy that 'right-sizes' parking for the increasingly urban environment. Without such programs, the propagation of a familiar outcome will continue: more driving, less street life, higher levels of pollution, and increased cost of providing and maintaining transportation infrastructure.

The Connectivity Master Plan called for the study of parking relative to Norwalk's Downtown, and this report summarizes the findings and recommendations of that study. Significant stakeholder outreach guided the development of the recommendations. In a nutshell, the recommendations are structured to provide an incremental approach to phasing out minimum ratio-based parking requirements and establishing maximums, or caps, to the amount of new parking that is allowed. Naturally such a change is a challenge to implement immediately. Plan stakeholders advised on taking incremental steps toward achieving the end goal, so a 10-year program was developed to coincide with the phasing of Downtown Norwalk's redevelopment agenda as well as the implementation of various Connectivity initiatives.

The flowchart on the following page provides a conceptual framework for the implementation of the parking recommendations discussed in this plan. The process starts with adjusting parking requirements and pricing to more appropriately reflect Downtown's urban context. Following an assessment and adjustment of those initial strategies, a more progressive approach to pricing should be pursued in which rates for public parking are periodically adjusted to maintain optimum utilization of spaces. From there, assuming the successful implementation of previous strategies, a move toward eliminating minimum requirements should be made. This will provide greater flexibility to developers, and will remove some of the barriers to infill development. The tail end of the plan calls for capping the amount of new parking a developer can build. This policy assumes that in 10 years, Downtown Norwalk will have experienced the completion of a significant amount of their development program, and land value will be much greater (and more scarce) than it is today. Parking maximums will help ensure that available space is optimally utilized for the highest and best use, and that parking development does not compromise the transportation and livability goals articulated in the Connectivity Plan.

Implementation Timeline