

The Downtown Parking Management Strategy Is Working

Chances are you have had a much easier time finding a parking space when you last visited downtown. Even though over thirty new businesses have opened downtown during the last year and the traffic and pedestrian counts are way up over prior years, parking for customers and clients in locations convenient to where they want to go seems more available. That's because that perception is based in reality. On any given day now, there is almost always at least one empty curbside parking space somewhere in the block with your intended destination.

Gone are the days from a few years ago when customers and clients routinely circled the block where the business they intended to patronize was located for three or four times trying to find an open parking space before leaving and going somewhere else or calling the business to reschedule because a convenient parking space could not be found. In November 2007, just before the establishment of the Downtown Parking Management District, the average length of stay for a vehicle utilizing a time-restricted curbside parking space downtown was five hours and twenty minutes. In fact, several hundred vehicles never moved from the same time-restricted public curbside space for more than eight straight hours back in 2007. Turnover of the public parking assets was almost none existent in several key retail blocks of downtown – as well as several blocks around professional firms, courthouses, and government buildings. As a result of it being so difficult for customers to find a convenient place to park, many of the businesses struggled. Ground floor (i.e. retail) space stayed vacant or was leased for several dollars a square foot less than what it should have garnered because there was little convenient customer parking. The Downtown Parking Management District (managed by the DIB) started operations in January 2008 to try and bring balance, equity, predictability, and convenience back to the use of public parking in the downtown. It didn't take a social scientist to quickly come to the conclusion that having convenient customer and client parking near where patrons wanted to go was critical if existing businesses were going to survive and prosper or if new businesses were going to choose downtown as a location.

Fast forward to near the end of 2010. The average length of stay for vehicles using a time-restricted curbside parking space had dropped to fifty-one minutes. In addition, more than thirty percent more vehicles were using the curbside spaces than were able to do so three years earlier. Gone are the calls to build more expensive public parking garages because of a perceived lack of parking. There has never been a parking inventory problem in downtown. There was a problem with the management (or lack thereof) of the parking spaces and parking policies; but, not any more.

Downtown is more active and occupied today than it has been in over a decade. Making sure that convenient customer/client parking is available – and remains available - has played a part in the renaissance now running at full speed. Based on the recent results from the DIB's Annual Downtown Business Census, the percentage of downtown employees that park in public curbside parking spaces to go to work has decreased by more than thirty-seven percent in the last four years. Almost 400 downtown employees that in 2007 use to park curbside on the street now park in an off-street lot or garage provided by their employer or in one of the sixteen public off-street facilities operated by the Downtown Parking Management District.

By improving the experience and predictability in the off-street parking facilities and consistently encouraging behavior modification by those that monopolize the curbside public parking assets for excessive periods of time, the perception of available parking and the reality of access to such parking for downtown users is now common place.

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