

More Parking For North Palafox Street

Around the first of May, a contractor for the Downtown Parking Management District will start converting many of the parallel parking spaces along N. Palafox Street between Garden Street and Wright Street to back-in angled parking. This new application will occur along the building side of both the northbound and the southbound lanes. The parallel parking next to the median in these three blocks will remain as it is currently configured. The two traffic lanes in each direction will be reduced to one oversized driving lane northbound and one oversized driving lane southbound. All new back-in angled parking will be non-metered (free) time-restricted 2-hour parking.

By converting approximately one-half of all parallel parking spaces along this wide boulevard street to angled parking, an additional 92 public parking spaces will be created in the three block area. This amount of additional public parking within the sightline from the front doors of the buildings along these blocks will make many of the adjoining buildings viable once again. It will also make it much easier for customers and clients of the existing businesses to find convenient free parking near where they want to go. This conversion was prescribed in the 2007 Downtown Retail Strategy to help reactivate the last remaining concentration of vacant commercial buildings (currently eighty-two thousand square feet of empty space in these three blocks) in downtown. Unfortunately, the average length of time that buildings in this three block section of downtown have remained vacant over the last seven years has been 4.6 years. Inadequate parking for customers and clients is one of the main reasons.

Another concern voiced by many of the past prospective users (both developers and tenants) has been the speed of the traffic and the unfriendly atmosphere for pedestrians in this part of downtown. At some times of the day, it is very difficult to cross such a wide multi-laned street safely. By converting approximately 50% of the public parking on N. Palafox Street to angled parking, significantly increasing the density of parking, and removing one of the traffic lanes in each direction, it will have the effect of calming the traffic. This action alone will give much greater exposure to businesses located along this section of Palafox Street. It will also make pedestrians more willing and able to easily cross the streets. But most importantly, it will, by its design and function, discourage those through vehicles that currently use the northbound lane of N. Palafox as a shortcut to get to the I-110 ramp. The DIB firmly believes that this action will bring the same type of economic revival to the commercial activity along N. Palafox Street as the return of two-way traffic and four-way stops did to Palafox Place just over two years ago. Between two and three years from now, we should all expect more businesses, more jobs, more investment, more pedestrians, and more overall activity 24/7 all along N. Palafox Street because of these new parking patterns.

Back-in angled parking was selected because of its safety record over head-in angled parking. City after city across North America that has added angled parking next to an active roadway during the last decade has chosen to go with this “new” parking pattern because it significantly reduces rear-in collisions and negative interactions between pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. Back-in angled parking is easier than parallel parking. In fact, it represents the

same first three movements of a perfect parallel parking maneuver. The primary difference is that on the third movement, the driver backs to the curb instead of straightening up.

In my book, it's a great day when we can increase the economic development potential of an area, make the area safer for all users, reclaim a part of historic Pensacola for pedestrians, and be one of the leaders in Florida with regards to implementing this progressive approach to public parking - all at the same time.

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