DRAFT Downtown Parking Report

Amherst Planning Department
July 24, 2015

Executive Summary

The goal and purpose of the Downtown Parking Report is to provide a detailed summary of the parking forums held in 2014 and 2015, and to provide a set of strategies and recommendations for the Select Board and Planning Board regarding changes to parking in downtown Amherst.

The Report includes a summary of the information provided and received during each forum. It identifies the results of the prioritization exercise of the third forum and identifies and outlines a preliminary set of strategies and recommendations. The Report will include appendices of all the data collected and resources provided and referenced in the report, identified during the forums, or that provide insight, and the Report will reference and incorporate the parking-related sections of the recently completed Transportation Plan.

Many of the comments received during the forums relate to the need for additional parking to foster new business and residential growth. Entities such as the Jones Library, Amherst Cinema, the Business Improvement District (BID), Chamber of Commerce, and numerous business owners have identified that additional parking is critical for their customers and to sustain a vibrant and relevant downtown. Other comments focused on the need to use the existing parking as efficiently as possible and to review the existing regulations.

A number of residents strongly opposed the option of considering a new parking facility and asserted either that this is being caused by the zoning that does not require on-site parking and/or that a developer should provide parking with each project. They expressed the position that as residents they do not have problems finding parking and that the need for a new parking garage is exaggerated.

The forums highlighted the importance of understanding how different end users experience parking and how having adequate parking located near desired destinations can affect the viability of a town center or an entire community. Many Amherst residents participating in the forum stated that they never have a problem finding a place to park; a subset of those citizens asserted that tax payers should not have to pay for and provide public parking that could be used for private developments. Alternatively, business owners participating in the forum stated that their business and their customers who travel to Amherst from many different locations rely on predictable supplies of parking nearby, and that during most Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings throughout the year, the availability of parking for the most desirable destinations is increasingly limited, unpredictable, and inadequate. They identified the need for centralized and dependable parking as an essential resource for visitors coming to downtown Amherst for the first time, or infrequently, and for people choosing to live downtown.

The Report outlines a two-pronged approach to addressing downtown parking issues (each of which would involve separate processes and timelines but could occur simultaneously or in parallel):

1. Begin a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility.

2. Undertake strategies and efforts to maximize the efficiency and availability of existing parking supply.

The need to collect and analyze updated parking data was identified by both people for and against a new parking facility. However, as is stated elsewhere in this report, waiting for updated parking data to act on the strategies and options in this Report is not necessary. The input from the forums, the existing data, and the Transportation Plan provides a baseline and guidance and to wait would delay beginning important improvements to parking downtown.

It is intended that this Report will be used by the Select Board, Planning Board, and community in taking steps to evaluate the existing parking system, supply, and options for improving or expanding the availability and predictability of parking downtown.

Acknowledgments

A sincere thank you to all the residents, business owners, organizations and people who took their valuable time to attend some or all of the forums related to downtown parking.

Select Board
Aaron Hayden (former Chair)
Alisa Brewer (Chair)
Constance Kruger
Douglas Slaughter
Andrew Steinberg
James Wald

Planning Board
David Webber (Chair)
Richard Roznoy
Stephan Schreiber
Greg Stutsman
Bruce Carson
Robert Crowner
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Other documents not listed in the Report

- Online Comments from September 2014 to January 2015
- Gazette Article, dated December 15, 2014
- Amherst BID letter, dated January 20, 2015
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- Downtown Parking History, 1961-2014
- Chamber of Commerce, Parking in the Central Business, undated (estimated 1977)
- Parking Task Force, Preliminary Report and Recommendations, August 1989

Introduction

On September 23, 2014, January 20, 2015, and March 23, 2105, a series of forums related to parking in downtown Amherst were held. The series, co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department, was intended to begin a dialogue and broad community planning process about parking downtown. The impetus for starting the discussion was two-fold:

1. Beginning in the Fall of 2012 the downtown began to see new development with the approval of Kendrick Place by the Planning Board and later in the Spring of 2014 the approval of One East Pleasant Street. Subsequent to the approval of Kendrick Place, some residents and business owners expressed surprise and confusion that a project would be approved with little or no parking on-site. The lack of knowledge by some of the existence of, or purpose and intent of, the Municipal Parking District was a cause for concern amongst the Planning Board and Town staff. In fact, the Zoning Subcommittee of the Planning Board considered reviewing the MPD requirements at that time, but realized that parking downtown is a complex interconnected system and a more comprehensive review would be more appropriate.
2. In August 2014, the Executive Office of Housing and Urban Development announced a new grant funding source of $1,000,000 for communities to study and implement parking management plans. This type of inventory, data, and evaluation would have provided the Town with valuable updated information about the current parking supply and demand. (NOTE: It was in February 2015, after the second forum, that the Baker Administration announced budget cuts which eliminated the entire funding source for communities to study parking).

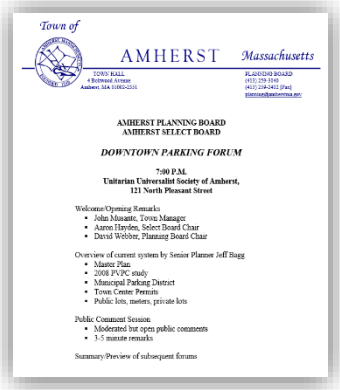
It was this combination of the concerns, questions, and interest in parking downtown and the possibility for the Town to receive grant funding to obtain an updated parking data which created the prime opportunity to proactively engage the members of the public and business community through a forum process. It is intended that this Report will be used by the Select Board, Planning Board, and community in taking steps to evaluate the existing parking system, supply, and options for improving or expanding the availability and predictability of parking downtown. It outlines a two-pronged approach to addressing downtown parking issues (each of which would involve separate processes and timelines but could occur simultaneously or in parallel):

1. Begin a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility.
2. Undertake strategies and efforts to maximize the efficiency and availability of existing parking supply.

The need to collect and analyze updated parking data was identified by both people for and against a new parking facility. However, as is stated elsewhere in this report, waiting for updated parking data to act on the strategies and options in this Report is not necessary. The input from the forums, the existing data, and the Transportation Plan provides a baseline and guidance and to wait would delay beginning important improvements to parking downtown.

Chapter 1 – Parking Forum One

September 23, 2014



Town of AMHERST Massachusetts

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AMHERST PLANNING BOARD
AMHERST SELECT BOARD

DOWNTOWN PARKING FORUM

7:00 P.M.
Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst,
121 North Pleasant Street

Welcome/Opening Remarks
- John Musante, Town Manager
- Aaron Hayden, Select Board Chair
- David Webber, Planning Board Chair

Overview of current system by Senior Planner Jeff Bagg
- Master Plan
- 2008 PVPC study
- Municipal Parking District
- Town Center Permits
- Public lots, meters, private lots

Public Comment Session:
- Moderated but open public comments
- 3-5 minute remarks

Summary/Preview of subsequent forums

The first in a series of community forums related to downtown parking, co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board, was held on September 23, 2014 at the newly renovated meeting room at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst. The purpose of the first forum was to begin a broader community planning process by providing a basic overview of the current parking system and to provide an opportunity for public comment. The forum was facilitated by Senior Planner Jeff Bagg.

The first part of the forum described the components of the current parking system, including a review of the Master Plan as it relates to parking, the Municipal Parking District, and the Town Center Permit system. The second part of the forum provided a platform for residents, business owners, and others to identify issues and concerns, ask questions, make comments, or offer potential solutions. The goal of the public comment session was not to provide immediate answers or responses; rather, it was to record, catalog, and compile the comments.

A comprehensive new webpage (www.amherstma.gov/parkingforum) was prepared and was dedicated to providing complete copies of historical information and studies, as well as updated information in response to the community planning process, including the video of the forum along with notes collected. The webpage also provided an opportunity for comments to be submitted online. The intent was to hold subsequent forums to present a summary of the issues and concerns raised and to create a collaborative, comprehensive, and open process for the community, Select Board, and Planning Board to establish future options and solutions regarding this complex topic.

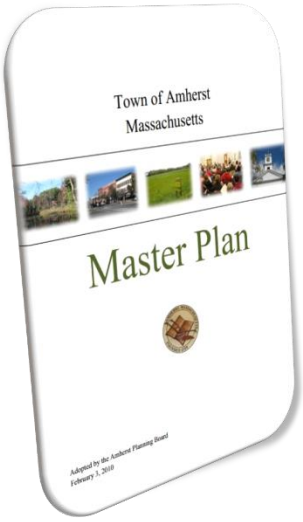
In August, the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development announced $1,000,000 from municipalities to inventory, evaluate, and provide demand-based management plans. This was highlighted as an exciting opportunity for the Town to gather updated information on parking as part of this process.

The following components of the existing parking system are outlined herein:

- Master Plan
- 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Study
- Municipal Parking District
- Town Center Permit parking
- Public off-street metered parking
- Private lots, winter parking, non-metered on-street

To watch a video of the first forum, click here
To view the slideshow presented at the forum, click here.
To view the scribed notes taken during the forum, click here.

Master Plan



Overview

The Town of Amherst Master Plan was adopted by the Planning Board on February 3, 2010. The document is described as the community's "blueprint" for the future. It is intended to be the broadest policy document a community can have to guide decision-making on long-term physical development over a period of decades or even generations.

The plan was based on significant public input throughout the planning process which began when Town Meeting voted funds in 2006. The effort was led by the appointed Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC) with at-large members and others from town committees and civic groups. The CPC worked closely with the national consulting firm of ACP in order to facilitate the process, known as *Planning Amherst Together*, and to develop the draft Master Plan that was presented to the Planning Board for its review and adoption.

To view the wealth of information gathered during *Planning Amherst Together* and the entire Master Plan, click here.

The first forum identified those areas of the Master Plan that relate to parking downtown. The forum highlighted many of the objectives or strategies already met through the efforts of Planning Board and others and those that still require implementation It's important to note that the issues and concerns related to parking downtown are not new and many options and strategies have previously been identified. The Master Plan is an important resource for understanding generally accepted concepts related to parking:

T.4.B Adjust existing regulations to help reduce the number of cars in the downtown area.

- Expand the Municipal Parking District (within which selected uses are exempt from parking requirements) to other areas of the downtown and village centers.
- Remove or reduce parking requirements in the Zoning Bylaw for most residential and commercial development in the downtown area in order to increase density, maximize the area available for residential and commercial development, and create a vital

T.5.C Plan for meeting current and future transportation demand through off-street multi-modal facilities providing a range of services.

Where appropriate, multi-modal facilities should include such amenities as:

- Automobile parking.
- Public transit/shuttle stops.
- Full service public transit terminals.
- Access to rail transit.
- Pedestrian facilities and directional information.
- Bicycle parking, secure storage, and changing rooms/showers.
- Rentals of bicycles, Zip cars or the like.
- Recharging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles.

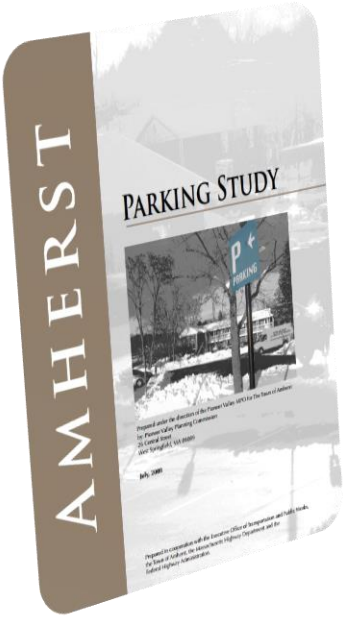
T.5.A Make changes in parking policies to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.

- Inventory existing downtown parking to assess current parking patterns, demand, and availability.
- Encourage employers to offer parking permits to employees.
- Restructure metered parking into zones with a tiered fee structure such that the most convenient parking is the most short-term and more expensive than areas further away from downtown.
- Consider applying a progressive price structure to meters with three-hour limits or more.
- Set meter rates so that a minimum percentage (15%?) of parking spaces remains open during peak periods.
- Increase parking revenue by adding meters on Town streets near University of Massachusetts.

T.5.B Evaluate existing downtown public and private parking areas for reorganization, management, enhancement, or potential redevelopment as multi-modal facilities, preferably in concert with private mixed-used redevelopment of adjacent streetfront areas.

Areas to include in this evaluation include, but are not limited to, the Boltwood Walk parking garage, CVS lot, Amity Street lot, parking sites at the north end of downtown, in the interior of the East Pleasant/Triangle/Pray Street block, and the Amherst College alumni parking lot south of Spring Street.

2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Parking Study

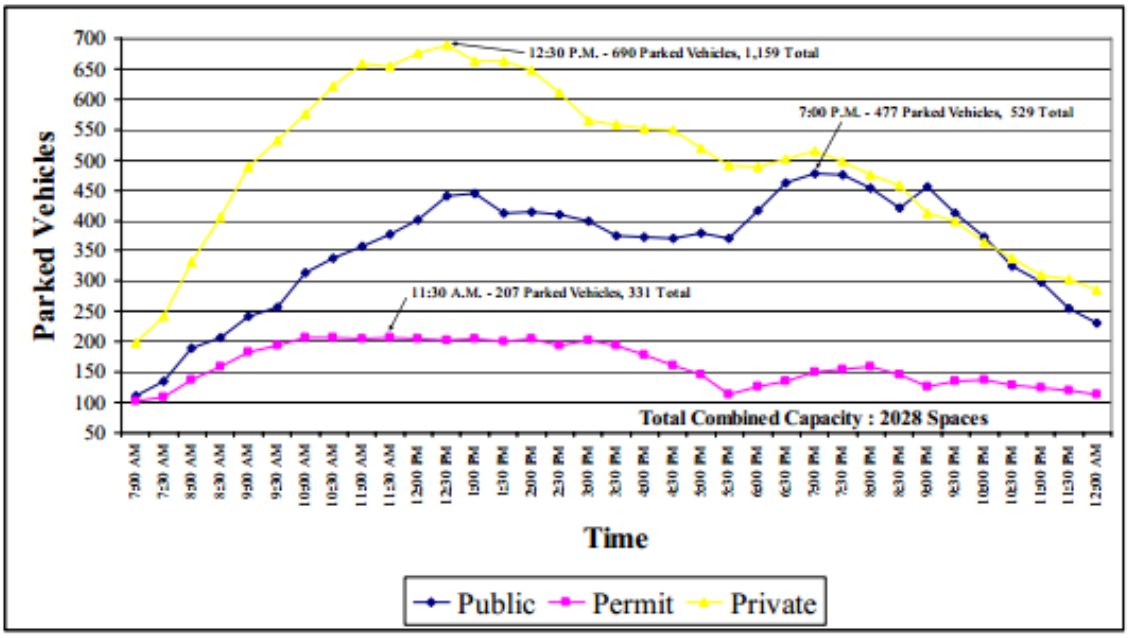


Overview

In July of 2008, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission completed a report which includes a parking inventory (information on the number of parking spaces, their location, time restrictions, and type of parking facility), accumulation checks (the total number of vehicles parked at any given time and hourly variations and peak parking demand), and turnover rates (the amount of time a vehicle occupies a specify parking space). The completion of this study implemented one of the early identified strategies of the Comprehensive Planning Committee as part of the Master Plan process.

The inventory identified a total of 2,019 parking spaces in the downtown study area. This includes 538 public parking spaces (including on-street meters and public lots), 331 permit parking spaces, and 1,159 private parking spaces. The report notes that the total number of private spaces exceeds the combined total of the public parking and permit parking spaces.

The study identifies the parking usage data for public, private, and permit parking. It finds that private parking is highly utilized within the study area throughout the average work day. However, public parking increases in usage toward the evening hours and permit parking varies slightly throughout the day. The following chart (Figure III-2 of the 2008 Study) illustrates the peak demand and maximum occupancy information for each parking type:



To view the entire 2008 PVPC parking study, click here.

The study includes the following conclusions:

- "Data collected suggests that the current parking supply in the downtown area sufficiently meets the current parking demand" [as of 2008]
- "Peak parking demands typically occur during the early afternoon hours"
- "Lots 44, 46 (the on-street meters in front of TD Bank and Jones Library), 54 (behind Hastings), 68 (permit parking on south side of Amity between Lincoln and South Prospect), and 78 (west side of Churchhill adjacent to Police station) meet or exceed 100% utilization during the data collection period, however, many other parking areas fail to exceed 50% utilization rates"
- "The southern region of the study area is where the highest concentration of public parking facilities are located"
- "The northern region is primarily comprised of private parking lots servicing various retail stores, banks, and restaurants"
- "Public parking lot 15 (Pray Street) is utilized only after the surrounding private lots have reached maximum utilization"

The following is a summary of the recommendations. Where applicable, the recommendations have also been referenced and incorporated into Chapter 4, Strategies and Recommendations:

Pray Street public lot

- Consider measures to enforce adjacent private parking
- Allow long term parking

CVS public lot and private lot

- Improve designation of public/private lots & signs
- Joint Use Agreement w/CVS
- Municipal Permit parking

Amity Street public lot

- Consider Use Agreement/purchase of Bank of America lot
- Remove curb and allow access between lots

Public awareness campaign

- Highlight preferred areas, dangers of parking in private lots, overflow parking areas
- Meter feeding
- Short term issuance of warnings; long term issuance of citations intended to encourage use of permit areas

Long term parking

- Consider additional long term parking in lots 59, 60 and 88.
- Color coded meters & concentrate in central area

Overflow parking signs

- Implement signage to direct patrons to free parking times on weekends or special events

Parking use agreements

- Consider approaching owners of underutilized private lots to develop an agreement to allow additional public parking
- Advantage include ability to increase parking enforcement
- Create designated overflow parking
- Reduce illegal parking in provide lots by providing additional public parking

Future development

- Changes in land use or future development in the downtown area could require the need for additional parking.
- Potential new development projects or significant expansion projects should be required to demonstrate how they will accommodate vehicle parking
- Consider opportunities to expand the existing public parking supply (acquisition of private land for use a public parking areas, the development of satellite parking areas for municipal employees and vehicles, and an expansion of the existing permit parking system

Municipal Parking District

Overview

First created in the 1960's, and expanded in 1986 and 2009, the Municipal Parking District is a zoning overlay district intended *"to encourage the dense development and pedestrian spaces in Amherst Town Center. Toward that end, provision of off-street parking is not required for selected uses within the MP District"*.

Within the District, certain uses, such as apartments, retail stores/shops, restaurants, and offices, are exempt from the requirement of providing off-street parking. The regulation is as follows:
Notwithstanding the other provisions of Section 7.0, off-street parking spaces need not be provided for any principal or related accessory uses under the following categories of Section 3.3, Use Chart: Residential Use (Section 3.32), Retail Business and Consumer Service Use (Section 3.35), and Research and Industrial Use (Section 3.37), located within the Municipal Parking District as herein defined. The following uses shall be required to meet the parking requirements of this Bylaw within the MP District: dormitory or similar college residence hall, hotel or motel, inn and all other principal and accessory uses under other categories of Section 3.3, Use Chart.

The removal of zoning requirements for certain uses to provide onsite parking is part of the Town's parking system. It involves the availability of public parking for patrons, customers and guests (provided by the Town's on-street meters and public lots). It also involves the availability of parking for employees and residents at the periphery of the downtown area (provided by the Town Center Permit parking areas). This system anticipates and provides different parking options for different end users. It is an essential tool to enable the creation of new restaurants, offices, and dwelling units to occur and create vibrancy and accommodate pedestrians in the downtown area.

The success of downtown is contingent upon the ability for new establishments to open and buildings to be built that rely on and utilize public parking and permit parking. A quick examination of a fairly typical downtown building finds that this 12 unit building with five commercial spaces (two retail and three restaurants) would require approximately 51 parking spaces on-site were it not for the Municipal Parking District. (1,400 sq. ft. retail = 4 parking spaces, 12 units = 24 parking spaces, 3 restaurants = 23 spaces)

History

2009 - The area of the Municipal Parking District was expanded to the northern end of downtown in 2009. In part, the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting explains:

> *This purpose is consistent with the community's increased emphasis on denser, sustainable development in our centers—the 'village center' concept strongly supported in the community planning process and described in the draft Master Plan. Since the late 1960s, the MPD has supported this policy by relieving selected downtown uses from the requirement to provide parking. This frees up some surface area of downtown properties so that those areas can be covered with buildings or pedestrian uses, instead of parking lots.*

A complete copy of the 2009 Planning Board Report to Town Meeting, maps, and minority report are here: Article 7, May 2009, Municipal Parking District, Report to Town Meeting

2008 - The name of this section was changed from "Municipal Parking Zone" to "Municipal Parking District" and created the area as an overlay district in the Zoning Bylaw. During the development and consideration of this technical correction, several substantial policy issues were raised and ultimately were the impetus for the 2009 expansion. A complete copy of the 2008 Planning Board Report to Town Meeting is here: Article 27, March 2008, Municipal Parking District, Report to Town Meeting

1986 – The requirements of the Municipal Parking District (Zone) were amended to exempt residential uses downtown from requiring on-site parking. This change was the culmination of at least two years of study. As described in the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting:

> *In June 1984, a Town Center Task Force was appointed to review and make recommendations on development issues in the downtown. The Task Force completed its report with its recommendations in late 1984. One of the major issues the Task Force debated was the loss of residential units in the Town Center. Members believed that it was to the Town's benefit to encourage the retention and/or production of housing. One of the methods to accomplish this would be to reduce obstacles to residential use in the downtown. Both this article (Article 55) and Article 56* [which allowed residential uses by-right in the downtown] *are in response to the concerns and recommendations of the Town Center Task Force.*
>
> *The Downtown Subcommittee of the Planning Board has spent the past six months also discussion downtown issues. The subcommittee has used the Final Report of the Task Force as a starting point in its discussions. Therefore, these two Articles are the first steps in addressing downtown issues.*

A complete copy of the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting is here: Article 56, May 1986, Municipal Parking District, Report to Town Meeting

Town Center Permit parking

Overview

This system was adopted by the Select Board in October of 2000 and is a non-zoning permit system intended to provide long-term parking for people who live, work, or own property downtown while protecting prime-street parking for customers and visitors.

In 2008, at the time of the completion of the 2008 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission study, there were 331 permit parking spaces in the downtown Town Center Permit areas. The study concludes that the peak demand for permit parking occurs at 11:30 a.m. with 207 vehicles parked in those spaces.

The following are the basic eligibility requirements for a Town Center Permit (indicated by the blue Town Center Permit parking signs):

> *Eligibility for parking permits in the town center permit parking area shall be limited to persons who reside or work at, or own, properties which: a) are within the General Business (B-G) and abutting Limited Business (B-L) zoning districts or; b) have frontage on, or principal access by established rights of access, to posted streets or sections of streets listed in Section 1.0, except that the Select Board shall determine such permits as may made available to persons who reside or work on any such properties owned by Amherst College.*

The creation of the Town Center Permit program took years of work. Its completion was part of a multi-faceted management plan for downtown parking that included and was related to the permitting and construction of the 185 space Boltwood Walk Parking Garage (which was permitted in August of 2000 and operational in 2003). As excerpted from the 2000 Select Board Annual Report:

> *The parking permit system that the Parking Commission had been struggling with for several years was approved by the Select Board and went into effect on October 1. It is intended to make parking spaces available to shoppers and workers in the downtown area by offering permits only to people who live, work, or own property downtown.*

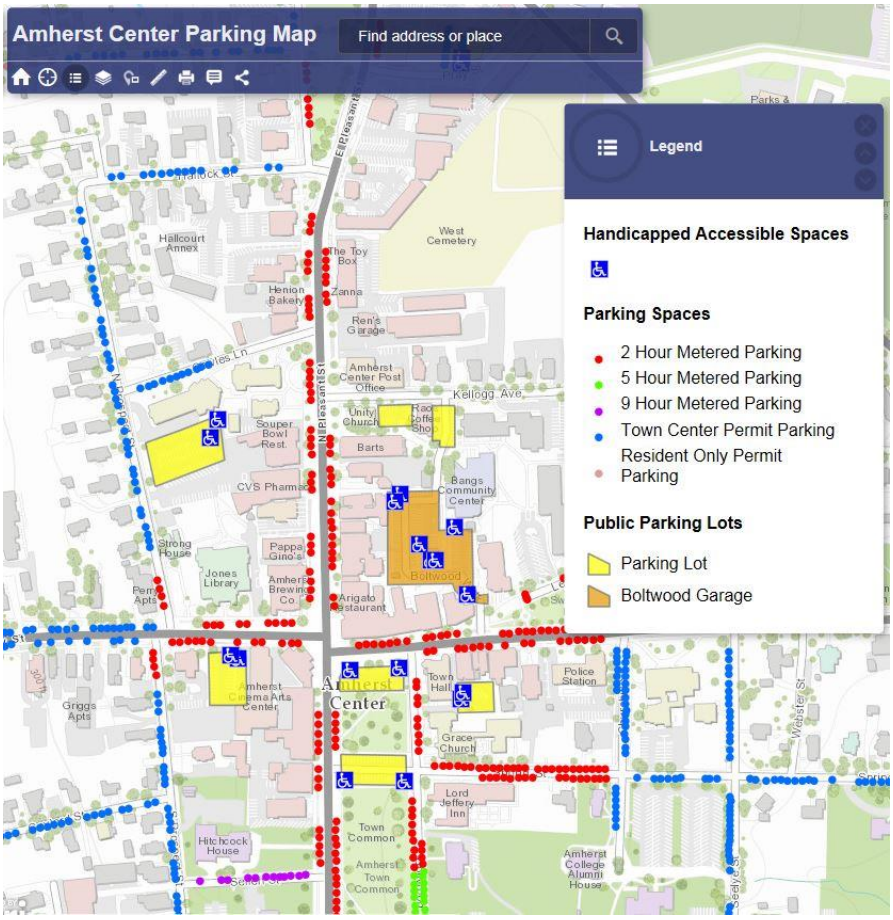
As excerpted from the 2000 Parking Commission Annual Report:

> *The Parking Commission made major progress this past year in working towards providing a comprehensive, self-supporting Town center parking system. After over 5 years of discussion about how to provide long-term parking, as well as studies of many permit systems and neighborhood meetings, on July 26, 1999 a permit system was adopted by the Select Board as part of the Town Bylaws. The system regulates long-term parking on streets in and around the Town center and restricts parking in two residential areas next to the University to residents of those streets. It operates from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from September through May. Town Center Permits were issued to 488 Town center business owners, employees and residents. In Resident-Only Are 1 (Allen Street and Nutting Avenue) there*

were 28 permits and 12 in Area 2 (McClellan Street). The permit system worked very well in its first year, with only a few requests for special exceptions brought to the Commission. Careful consideration was given to each of those. Efforts were made to follow parking patterns during the year. The purpose of the Town Center Permit system is to protect prime-street parking for shore term shoppers and visitors. The system clearly achieved that objective in the first year. The Resident-Only permits on streets near the University achieved the goal of preventing commuters from overcrowding those residential areas.

Based on preliminary data from the Collectors Office, in FY2014 an approximate total of 740 Town Center Permits were sold. Of those, approximately 150 were residential permits and 500 business permits. Data from 2008 sales of permits is not available. However, the Annual Report from 2000 indicates that one year into the program there was a total of 488 permits sold.

In addition to the Town Center Permit parking areas (designed for residents and employees downtown) there are two Resident-Only Permit parking areas. Those areas are located on Allen Street and Nutting Avenue and on the portion of McClellan Street between Beston Street and Lincoln Avenue. Data on these Resident-Only areas was not readily available.



In March 2013 the Select Board approved 46 new Town Center Permit spaces through the creation of 21 permit spaces on Gaylord Street and 25 spaces on Spring Street (which are dual purposed to allow for permit parkers and payment of meters).

To view the current Town Center Permit regulations, click here.

To view the interactive online parking map, click here.

Public off-Street (lots) and on-street metered parking

Overview

At the time of the 2008 PVPC parking study, there were 538 public parking spaces in the downtown area. Based on current information, approximately 407 of those metered spaces are located in nine public off-street metered parking lots:

Lot	Spaces	Limit	Time
CVS Public Lot	72	8 Hours	8am-8pm
Boltwood Garage	107	4 Hours	8am-8pm
Boltwood Garage, Lower Level*	80	4 Hours	8am-8pm
Town Hall Lot	18	4 Hours	8am-8pm
Amity (Cinema) Lot	33	3 Hours	8am-6pm
Kellogg Lot	4	2 Hours	8am-6pm
Lower Bangs Lot	21	2 Hours	8am-6pm
North Common Lot	34	2 Hours	8am-6pm
Spring Street Lot	38	2 Hours	8am-6pm

*Boltwood Garage Lower Level includes some reserved spaces. Also, the lower level is a designated area for parking during the winter parking ban.

The 2008 PVPC parking study concludes about public parking that:

- The Amity Street public lot is the highest utilized lot with a utilization rate of 97% between 11:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., 96% between 3:00 p.m. -6:00 p.m., and 92% between 6:00 p.m. -12:00 a.m. The North Common public lot and Spring Street lot also had utilization rates over 90% during the same times. The metered spots on both sides of Amity Street in front of the Jones Library and Amherst Cinema complex had utilization rates between 95%-100% between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 a.m.
- The southern region of the study area is where the highest concentration of public parking facilities is located.
- The peak demand for public spaces was observed at 7:00 p.m. when a total of 477 vehicles were parked.
- There were notable increases in demand during the lunch hour and after 8:00 p.m. (when the public parking areas are free).

It should be noted that the industry standard for evaluating parking demand establishes 85% as a standard for optimum utilization. The PVPC report contains conclusions which reference several public lots that exceed 100% utilization and some that fail to exceed 50% utilization. This is important in that some other public lots and public on-street parking (such as both sides of North Pleasant Street) had utilization rates of 85% or higher and were therefore operating beyond optimal levels.

Based on input at the forums, it has been suggested that the demand for parking has increased since 2008 (including but not limited to numerous new restaurants, new businesses, enhanced programing at the Jones Library, and success of the Amherst Cinema). Additionally, concerns were raised whether permitted new residential development (which are not required to provide parking on-site) will be supported by the current supply.

Private lots

Overview

At the time of the 2008 PVPC parking study, there were 1,159 private parking spaces in the downtown area. The Study identifies the importance of the fact that the number of private parking spaces exceeds the combined total of the public parking (538 spaces) and the permit spaces (331 spaces). It identifies that there is a higher concentration of private lots in the northern portion of downtown.

The Study identifies that the peak demand for private parking spaces was observed at 12:30 p.m. when a total of 690 vehicles were parked. It identifies that private parking areas include local businesses such as a restaurants and attributes this peak time, in part, to patrons coming to town for lunch.

The 2008 PVPC parking study concludes about private parking that:

- The private CVS lot is the highest utilized lot with a utilization rate of 110% between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. (over 100% utilization is the result of observed illegal parking)
- The northern region of the study area is primarily comprised of private lots servicing various retail stores, banks, and restaurants.
- As with the public lots, some private lots achieve or exceed 100% utilization while others do not exceed 50% utilization.

It should be noted that the industry standard for evaluating parking demand establishes 85% as a standard for optimum utilization. The PVPC report contains conclusions which reference several private lots that exceed 100% utilization and some that fail to exceed 50% utilization. This is important in that many private lots had utilization rates of 85% or higher and were therefore operating beyond optimal levels.

The Study provides recommendations that the Town pursue Joint-Use agreements with the owners of private parking area to allow for additional public parking. It identifies that a typical agreement would:

- Indicate the location and number of spaces available for public use.
- Describe the routine general maintenance requirements of the Town of Amherst.
- Create the ability to increase parking enforcement.
- Create designated overflow parking areas to direct vehicles
- Reduce illegal parking in private lots by providing additional public parking convenient to local business.

The study specifically references the Amherst College Alumni Lot as a potential due to its large size and relatively (73%) low peak utilization rate.

Winter parking & Non-metered on-street parking

Overview

The on street parking regulations prohibit vehicles from parking overnight from December 1st to April 1st. The regulations define overnight as being between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. This applies to all areas of on-street parking including the Town Center Permit areas.

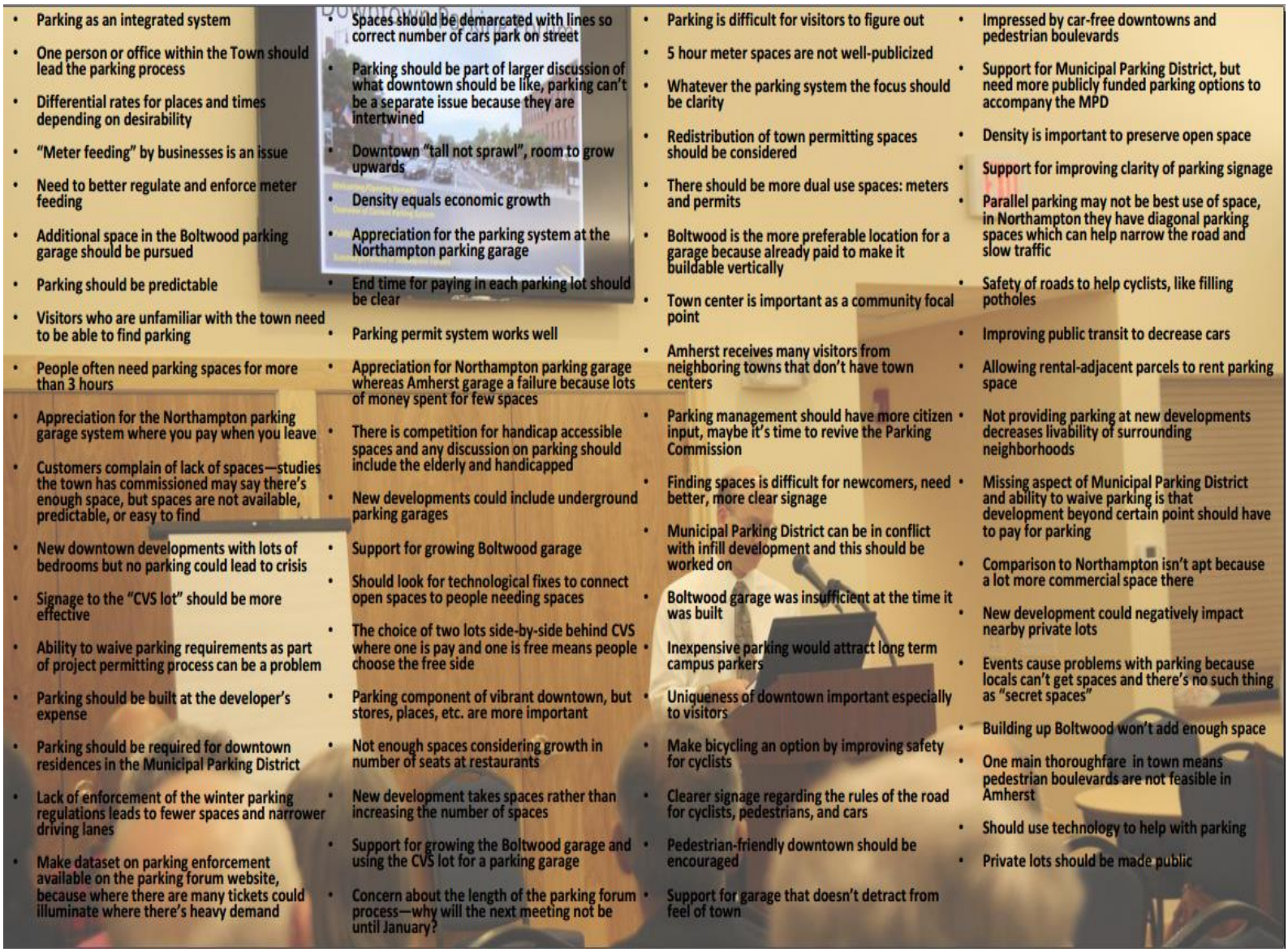
The current parking system provides for two areas for people with vehicles to park overnight during the winter. They are allowed in the 80 space lower level of the Boltwood Garage (although some spaces are reserved and therefore not available) and the 32 space Pray Street public lot. In 2014, the Town sold approximately 150 Town Center Permit to people residing in dwelling units in the downtown area.

The primary questions are whether this system really accommodates the current and future needs of people who reside downtown and whether there may be other options for better accommodating snow removal needs and the needs of residents in the downtown area. As identified in the goals of the Master Plan, and which has been a trend nationwide, more people are looking to be able to reside in more densely settled downtowns and cities and the current winter parking ban may be prohibitive.

To view the Town's Parking Rules and Orders, click here.

Public comment/input

As part of Forum One, nearly two hours of public comment and input were received. The following is an illustration of the ideas and issues raised.



A goal of the public comment session was not to provide immediate answers or responses, but to listen, record, and catalog issues, concerns, and questions. Subsequent forums will be used to confirm issues raised and begin to establish future options and solutions.

To view the scribed notes taken during the forum, click here.

To view the typed notes from the forum, click here.

Chapter 2 – Parking Forum Two

January 20, 2015

The second in a series of forums co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department was held on January 20, 2015 at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst.

The goals for the second forum were to:

- Identify and review all the issues, concerns, and information gathered
- Begin to group these items into categories
- Outline and identify preliminary goals and strategies for major issues
- Allow community members, business owners, Board members, and others to help identify, rank, and prioritize action items

Metering/Rates	New Parking Supply	Signs/Education	Review/change regulations	Enforcement/ Management	General/Broad concepts
Create different rates depending on location	Review/consider whether a new parking facility is needed; whether developers should provide parking	Parking is hard for visitors to find	Review/revise Municipal Parking District	Review/consider management of private lots	Existing data from 2008 may be outdated
Deter/prohibit meter feeding	Review/consider creation of a new parking facility	Signs for some public and private lots are hard to find and confusing	Review/revise Town Center Permit system	Re-establish the Parking Commission	What kind of downtown do we want?
Use new technology/smart phone app	Review/consider adding to Boltwood Garage	Promote use of Town Center Permit spots after 5:00 p.m.	Review/revise winter parking ban	Create a designated parking official	Consider parking is an integrated system
Make payment more predictable/pay when leaving	Review/consider expanding Town Center Permit areas	Better identify long-term and short term parking meters	Review/revise current on-street parking regulations	Lack of enforcement of winter parking ban	Parking is important to success of downtown

The format for the second forum consisted of an extensive presentation of the summary and initial issues, strategies, and options to begin to look at parking downtown. The goal of the presentation and groupings was to be begin to identify actions that could be considered short term, mid-term, and long term and to preliminarily identify regulatory authority and/or Town department (s) involved. This forum also included time for public input.

The chart above was prepared after the first forum and in advance of the second forum and arranges the information into groups and categories and was the basis for the information presented.

To view the memorandum to the Select Board, dated December 12, 2014, click here.

To view a video of the second forum, click here.

To view the slideshow from the second forum, click here.

To view the notes from the second forum, click here.

At the beginning of the forum, it was identified that the Town was in the process of completing a draft Town-wide Transportation Plan with the assistance of Nelson\Nygaard which would help further explore some of the transportation issues town wide as well as downtown. The timeline for this project works well with these efforst to review parking downtown. The expectation is for a draft in February with a final plan in April. This plan will not be a specific plan for parking downtown but it will assess existing conditions and provide a general review of downtown. Both initiatives will interact at some level.

The forum also clarified an exciting opportunity for grant funding from the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development was identified. Specifically, the grant program is intended for communities to prepare Parking Demand Management Plans.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Deval L. Patrick, Governor ◆ Gregory Bialecki, Secretary

NOTICE OF FUNDING AVAILABILITY

PARKING DEMAND MANAGEMENT PLANS (PDMP)
December 2014

I. PROGRAM GOALS

The immediate goal of funding Parking Demand Management Plans (PDMPs) is to support municipalities that are growing and require use of best practices that manage demand through improved utilization of supply and through demand-pricing mechanisms. The growth may be due to residential, commercial or industrial development, and may be increasing the parking needs of employees, business customers or tourists. There is a growing consensus in the transportation and parking management community that responding to increased demand for parking primarily by increasing supply is often a costly and counterproductive response. There is increasing interest in implementing measures that manage demand through improved utilization of supply and through demand-pricing mechanisms.

The following types of activities are included in the grant opportunity:

Collection of data on existing and projected demand and supply, including:

- *Compiling data on the number of residents and visitors (including employees, customers and tourists) who park in the municipality*
- *Inventory of the number of parking spaces available on-street and off-street in privately- and publicly-owned locations*
- *Utilization of existing supply at different times of the days and week*

Assessment of options for parking demand management and recommendation of options or a plan to municipal officials, including:

- *Preparing presentations and reports as needed*

Assist municipal officials during the process of considering and adopting a PDMP or changes in parking management, including:

- *Organizing, conducting or participating in public meetings*
- *Preparing presentations and reports as needed*
- *Working with stakeholders*
- *Assist in launch of implementation of any adopted plan or changes in parking management*
- *Preparing a detailed implementation plan*
- *Assist in identifying funding sources, reviewing or drafting zoning ordinances*

To view the full Notice of Funding Availability, click here.

It was identified that the timing of this grant funding opportunity, the ongoing forum process, and the Transportation Plan was very beneficial to keeping forward momentum for the Town's effort at addressing parking downtown.

Metering/Rates

Summary of Issues

Several strategies and options relate to enhancing the meter system and adjusting rates were identified. The primary strategy identified is to create different rates depending on location. The intent is to price the most heavily used and convenient parking areas higher to encourage quicker turnover and to incentivize the use of underutilized lots, which would have lower rates. This is referred to as "demand-based" pricing and creating this structure is a major component of the grant opportunity.

The Master Plan identifies the following strategies for meters and rates:

> ***STRATEGIES***
> ***T.5.A Make changes in parking policies to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.***
> - *Restructure metered parking into zones with a tiered fee structure such that the most convenient parking is the most short-term and more expensive than areas further away from downtown.*
> - *Consider applying a progressive price structure to meters with three-hour limits or more.*
> - *Set meter rates so that a minimum percentage (15%?) of parking spaces remains open during peak periods.*

Other strategies and options identified related to metering and rates include:

- **Better identify meters** – The primary option is to color code meters to allow visitors to more easily identify the length of time at each meter. The Town has two hour meters, five hour meters, and nine hour meters that unless a user is accessing the Town's online map cannot tell the meter type.
- **Make payment more predictable** – To review the payment options for the pay-by-space kiosks and encourage and promote the ability to pay by phone, etc.
- **Incorporate smart technology**
  - Incorporate and utilize the Town's WiFi system
  - App on a phone to allow a user that identifies a vacant spot or where parking is available
  - Allow meters to re-set
- **Deter/prohibit meter feeding** – To consider options to incentivize employees to use the Town Center Permit parking areas rather than parking in spaces that would be better reserved for patrons. This issue could be controversial and would require additional education and enforcement.

Signs & Education

Summary of Issues

Several issues related to the fact that parking is hard to find were identified. While some residents stated that they did not have a hard time finding parking (both in terms of location and availability), the target audience and need for improved signs should be aimed at visitors, customers, and patrons. Whether it is people who visit infrequently, are attending a movie at Amherst Cinema, or are parents bringing their child to college for the first time, the overall sign system related to parking is in adequate.

An ongoing project of the Planning Department, Department of Public Works, and Information Technologies is underway. Several examples of these improvements were outlined:

Information about the Town's application for a Downtown Technical Assistance Grant was reviewed. At the time of the forum the grant was not awarded (NOTE: it was subsequently granted to the Town of Amherst in2015). The scope of the program was outlined as:

> *Requests for assistance may address any aspect of developing a public way finding system and the creation of a distinguishable image or logo that carries through the various streetscape elements, including but not limited to: creation of public design elements that will be used throughout the downtown, way finding plan, cost analysis for implementation, and branding of a downtown through historic elements.*

Other options related to signs an education were identified including:

- Creating a Special Event Parking program
- Public awareness campaign for parking after 5:00 p.m.
- Create a "Discover Amherst" map
- Review and improve signs for public and private lots – The CVS private lot and the Cousins Market lot signs were identified as examples of signs or parking areas that are confusing for visitors to navigate and understand.

Regulations

Summary of Issues

Based on the input from the first forum, part of the process to address parking in downtown will be to review and evaluate the existing parking regulations. As identified, the existing parking regulations operate separately but are interconnected and create the overall parking system.

The following regulations are integral to the system and should be evaluated as part of a process to ensure the existing parking is being utilized as efficiently as possible:

Zoning Bylaw (Planning Board)
Municipal Parking District- There were a lot of questions raised about the impact of this section of the Zoning Bylaw which exempts certain uses, including dwelling units, retail, restaurants, and offices from requiring parking. Based on the forum input, consideration of this Bylaw provision should be a priority for the Planning Board to review and evaluate. Such review of this section of the Zoning Bylaw should be a planning process that is deliberative, proactive and informed by data. One of the issues to consider is whether new residential development downtown should be required to provide parking. Several options have already been preliminarily explored and include establishing thresholds for applicability, payment in lieu of providing parking spaces, and what if any requirement would the proper number of spaces be per unit. It important that such a review be completed in a context which acknowledges that the MPD currently exempts a range of uses including restaurants, retail stores, and offices form requiring parking, not just residential uses.

Permitting requirements for parking facilities – The creation of private parking facilities currently requires a Special Permit. Consideration should be given given to the potential benefits of making such a use subject to Site Plan Review rather than Special Permit.

Shared/leased parking/Parking Use Agreements – The current Zoning Bylaw contains provisions for shared parking. However, as written the Bylaw provision involves complex calculations and permit process to formalize shared parking arrangements. Consideration should be given to ensuring that the Bylaw is designed to encourage and maximize this option.

All of the parking regulations are found in Article 7 of the Zoning Bylaw. To view it, click here.

Town Center Permits (Select Board)
Explore areas for expansion – To determine if there are areas that are already used for parking, such as meters, and whether it could be beneficial to convert those spaces to Permit parking

Discourage/eliminate meter feeding – The practice of business owners or employees parking in the prime downtown parking areas rather than in the Town Center Permit areas was identified as a problem whereby high-demand spaces are not available for customers, patrons, or visitors.

Stripe all spaces – Some issues were raised about ensuring that existing parking spots are being used efficiently. Without striping, one vehicle parking haphazardly can eliminate several parking spaces from being utilized or available.

Review winter snow removal policy – In some cases, the storage of snow in the downtown area is stored in parking spaces or on sidewalks used by pedestrians. Also, in some cases, snow plowing or snow storage blocks, impedes, or creates hazardous conditions in areas used for on-street permit parking. Review of the DPW snow removal policy should be reviewed to ensure that clearing of the downtown areas is prioritized accordingly.

Review use/efficacy of residential only permit areas near campus – There are several permit areas designated as Resident-Only permit areas. These areas should be explored for efficacy and if expanded areas should be considered.

To view the Town Center Permit regulations, click here.

Off-street parking (Select Board)

Consider evaluation of periphery streets to determine if the existing regulations are effective. Certain streets, such as Lincoln Avenue are just outside of the downtown area and the existing Town Center Permit system. Such streets are sometimes regulated by signs while some, like Lincoln Avenue, have no signs at all. Their location within a relatively close walking distance to the downtown and the University make them susceptible to commuter parking.

Review overnight parking restriction. The prohibition of parking overnight during the winter poses substantial challenges to those who reside downtown. The regulations should be reviewed and evaluated to determine if there are any alternatives or options which can better accommodate the parking needs of those who reside downtown.

To view the Town's Parking Rules and Orders, click here.

New Parking Facility

Summary of Issues

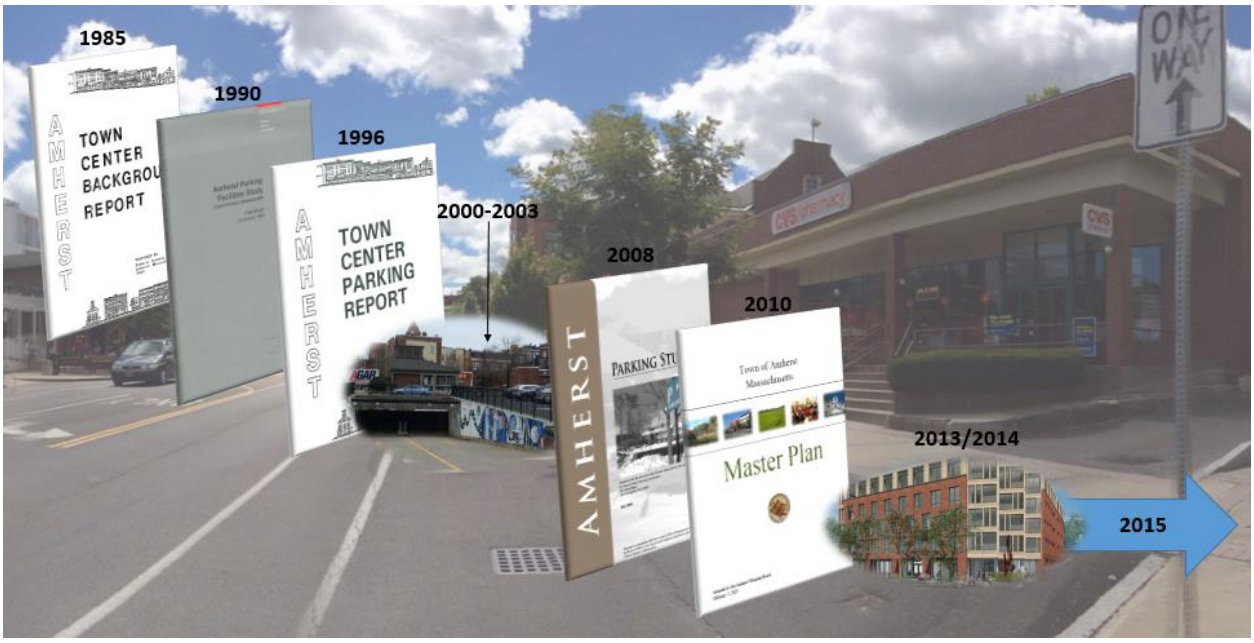
One of the larger topics identified during the first forum was consideration of a new parking facility. The input ranged from those who identified it as a need for which the Town should begin to pursue options now; to those who opposed the concept outright stating that parking is either not a significant issue or that parking constraints are manageable now and are only being made worse by new residential development permitted without parking.

The first forum identified concerns from Amherst Cinema and other existing businesses, the Jones Library, and others about how the current public parking supply relates to and limits the future growth of the downtown. Those entities identified a need for more public parking now as visitors, customers, and patrons are more frequently less able to find parking on most Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. Their primary need is for more public parking in key locations that is centrally located and predictable. During the first forum the business community, generally, stated that the demand for parking for visitors occurs at different times than the demand for parking for residents - and that residents don't use the same spaces as customers and visitors. The lack of public parking at peak times and in the most desirable lots was the major constraint and a new parking facility that provided a sufficient number of new spaces to increase supply over demand, is necessary to support existing and new business growth in the downtown.

Several residents stated that the need for a new parking facility is exaggerated and/or is being caused by recently permitted residential development with little or no parking provided. Several of the residents expressed surprise by the fact that the Town's zoning would allow new units without parking. These people believe that the concept of a new parking facility should not be considered and that tax payers should not be asked to pay for public parking that may be used by private developments; rather the existing zoning should be changed to require new development to provide parking.

Based on the first forum, there was support for the Town looking ahead now to gauge the future needs. While there was opposition to the need or concept of pursing a new parking facility, the forum input suggested that beginning the process should be a long term goal and be a community discussion that would involve a wide range of stakeholders including residents, business owners, property owners, visitors, customers, and patrons. At the same time, there was consensus that other steps should be taken to ensure that the existing parking supply is managed and regulated as efficiently as possible. As part of considering the need for a parking facility (and to pursue other strategies to evaluate the existing parking supply), the Town should move forward with collecting updated parking data. The recently announced grant from the State would jump start this effort and would provide continued forward momentum towards a community discussion on parking downtown.

In addition to gathering updated parking data, reviewing and understanding some of the long and complex history related to parking downtown is also important. The following documents and information related to parking downtown were identified and reviewed in a cursory manner:

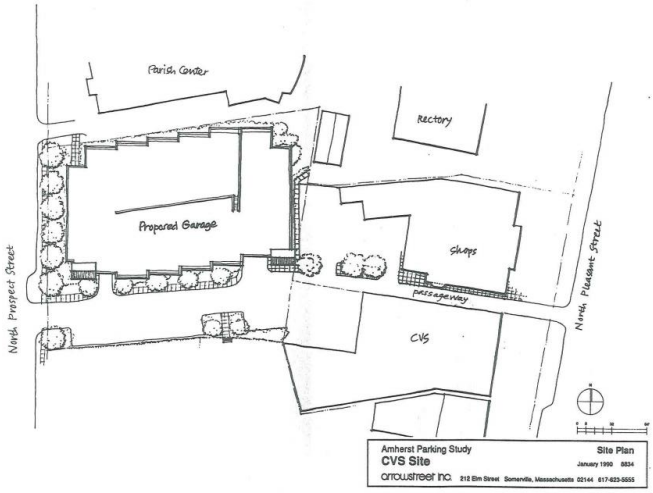


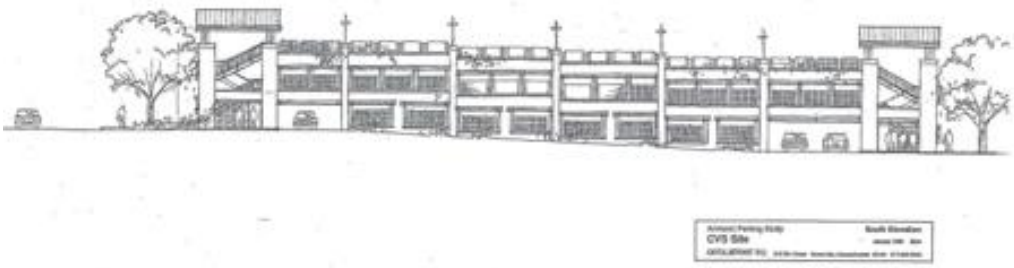
1985	Town Center Background Report
1986	Municipal Parking District change
1989/1990	Amherst Parking Facilities Study (large file)
1996	Town Center Parking Report
1997	Parking garage process begins
2000	Town Center Permit system created
2001	Planning Board approved Parking Garage
2003	Boltwood Garage opens
2008	PVPC parking study completed
2010	Master Plan adopted
2013/2015	New development is permitted and begins

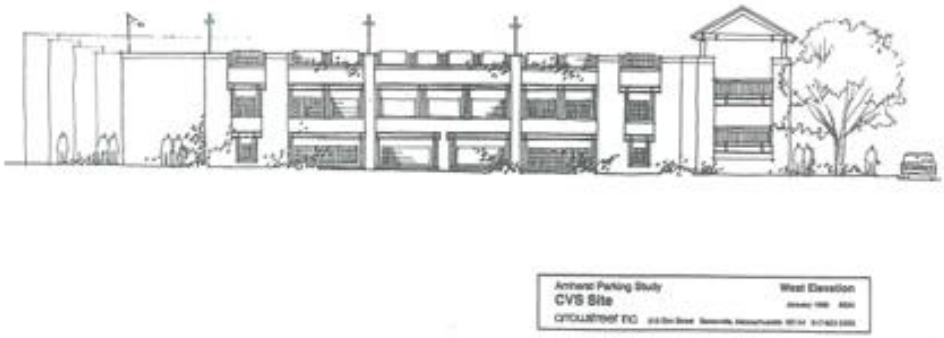
During the first forum, the public CVS lot was identified several times as a logical place for the Town to consider a new parking facility. It was identified that in 1990 a consultant prepared a Parking Facilities Report which included analysis of three sites: The public CVS public lot, the Boltwood Walk area, and the Amity Street public lot. The report concluded that the CVS lot was the preferred location for a parking structure. As part of the public process between 1990 and 2000, the Boltwood Walk area was ultimately chosen for the construction of the Town's existing 185 space Boltwood Walk Garage.

An in-depth review the 1990 Parking Facilities Study was not provided for the second forum. It was noted that the study had concluded that the CVS lot was the preferred site (backed by substantial data) and provided schematic drawings, traffic counts, and a financing feasibility study for the construction of a 251 parking space garage on 3.5 levels.

The following are some of the schematics from the 1990 Facilities Study presented during forum 2:







Additional information regarding the 1990 Facilities Study is found in Chapter 4 of this report.

Other input from the first forum considered broader concepts regarding the downtown area, including but not limited to:

What kind of downtown do we want – These comments focused on the importance of considering new trends, anticipating future needs, and bolstering Amherst as a destination.

Master Plan - It was identified that the Master Plan was identified as having consisted of a substantial public process from 2006 through its adoption in 2010

Table 1.1 Planning Amherst Together – Timeline of Major Activities

Activity (* signifies a public involvement activity)	Timeframe
Public Idea Gathering Meetings * - Several large public brainstorming sessions to identify community needs, concerns, and desires.	Fall 2006
Technical Research, Drafting of Existing Conditions and Trends Report – Staff and consultant data-gathering.	Summer/Fall 2006
Work Group Workshops * - Groups of citizens assigned to focus on specific aspects of the community in open sessions.	Winter/Spring 2007
Community Choices * - Priority setting meetings.	March 2007
Community Survey * - A professionally-conducted survey of community preferences.	Summer 2007
Develop Draft Master Plan	Summer 2007
Last Call* - Mailing to Town Meeting members	Aug./Sept. 2007
Open House * - Review of the initial draft master plan.	October 2007
Revise and Finalize Master Plan – Work by a CPC subcommittee.	November 2007 – Nov. 2008
Planning Board Review and Adoption*	Nov. 2008 – Feb. 3, 2010

Encourage vitality in the downtown and village centers. Amherst's downtown and village centers should be a focus for the community's economic life, cultural vigor, and social activity. Vitality in these areas can be pursued through a variety of initiatives, including encouraging additional housing development, economic investment, expansion of cultural facilities, promotion of a mix of uses, and improvements to the public realm (parks, streetscapes, and public squares). These initiatives will lead to a more walkable community, allow for more day-to-day interactions among residents, and attract more visitors to the community while enhancing Amherst's growing tourism industry.

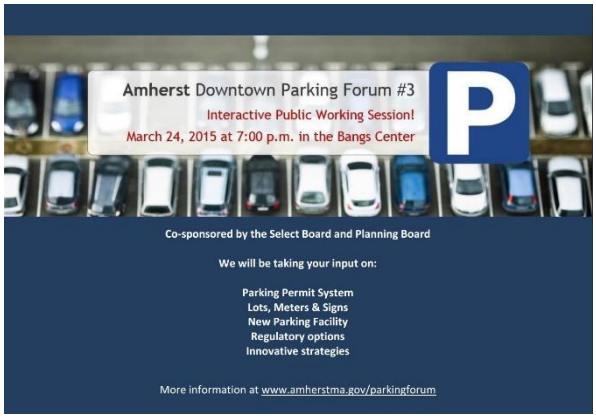
Land Use: A sustainable, attractive town with a vital downtown and viable mixed-use village centers well connected to livable and diverse neighborhoods and campuses, and interwoven with protected open space, natural resources, and active farmland.

- Preferentially direct future development to existing built-up areas.
- Create vital downtown and village centers (areas of mixed use, including retail, commercial, and residential elements) that are walkable, attractive and efficient.
- Revise the zoning code to promote infill development in strategic locations.
- Increase the opportunity for infill development and the location of housing development near services.
- Support sustainable growth of existing businesses and attract new ones while protecting environmental values.
- Support "relocalization" of the Amherst economy.
- Promote downtown as a key cultural, commercial and entertainment center of Amherst.
- Within the context of community transportation demand management planning, provide for adequate parking to support existing and desired new development in the downtown and elsewhere.

Density - Some preliminary identification of the residential density downtown was noted. Specifically, the 2010 census data indicates that there are approximately 9,711 dwelling units in the entire Town. Based on a review of preliminary numbers based on the Town's Rental Permit program, there are approximately 330 units (or 3.4%) of all the Town's units downtown. The recently permitted new residential/mixed used buildings are expected to add 120 units, which would bring the total number of unit's downtown to 4.5%. One of the broad questions is whether this is enough to meet the goals of the Master Plan.

Chapter 3 – Parking Forum Three

March 24, 2015

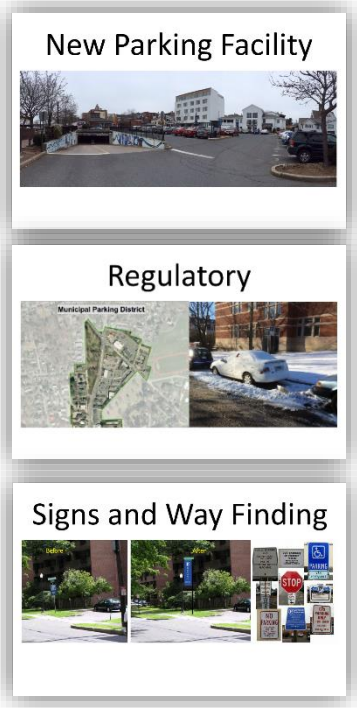


The third in a series of forums co-sponsored by the Select Board and Planning Board and hosted by the Planning Department was held on March 24, 2015 in the Bangs Community Center.

The format of the third forum was changed to create a more participatory event and create an opportunity to gather opinions and/or support for certain options and strategies. The event was broken down into three activities.

Activity one - Involved participants identifying on a map of the downtown where they park to get to certain destinations. The purpose of the activity was to help map and assess where people park in proximity to where they are going. The mapping results from this exercise are included as an appendix.

Activity two - Involved participants rotating around the room to six topic stations. At each topic station a member of the Planning Board or Select Board acted as a facilitator and scribed notes of comments, ideas, suggestions or concerns at each station. After approximately 40 minutes, the facilitator reported out to the larger audience a summary of the activity.



Activity three - The final exercise involved the completion of individual ranking sheets which asked participants to rank 14 strategies which were refined based on a basic understanding of the current parking system and the public input collected in forum 1 and forum 2. Participants also discussed their rankings in small groups and a representative from each table reported out to the larger audience the top three priorities of their respective tables.

The following is the Individual Ranking Form completed by participants, which was also available on-line for two weeks after the forum (the results are found below and in Chapter 4):

PARKING FORUM # 3

March 24, 2015

Exercise 3: INDIVIDUAL RANKING FORM

Name (optional) _____

For each question below, select the option that best fits your opinion on the importance of the issue.

Question	Choose an item.
Review snow removal policy for downtown parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Explore ways to expand Town Center Permit system	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Re-establish Parking Commission or similar	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Begin planning process for new parking facility now	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Update parking data	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Develop pilot program for overnight winter parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Improve signs for public lots	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Promote use of Town Center Permit parking after 5:00 p.m.	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Evaluate regulations for streets near downtown	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Create a Special Event parking program	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Consider different fees for metered parking	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Make payment simpler and more predictable	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion
Review smart technologies/app's	1 Strongly Support 2 Support 3 Neutral 4 Strongly Oppose 5 No Opinion

OTHER COMMENTS, IDEAS, INPUT

SEE OVER

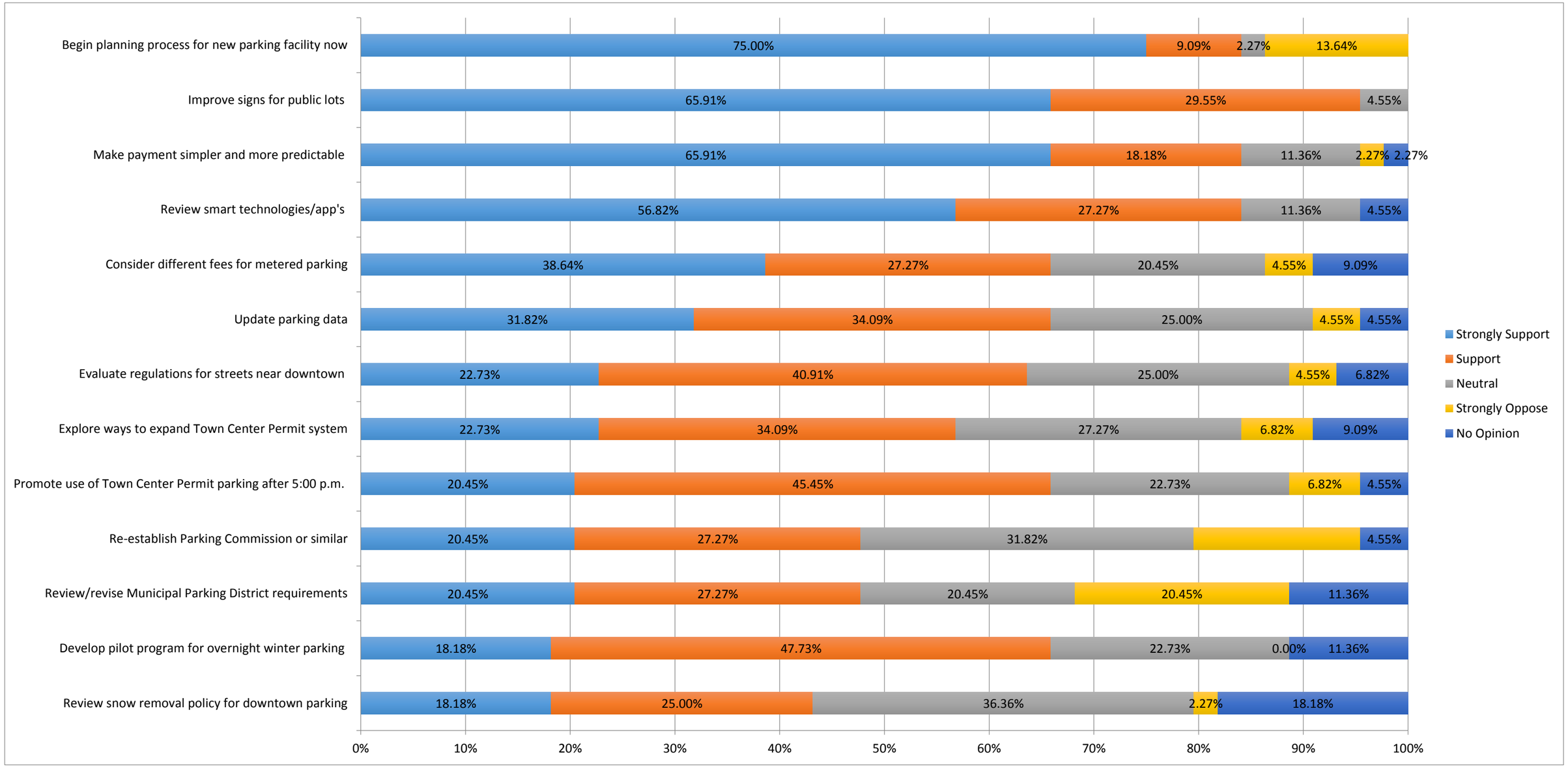
2

To view the video of forum three, click here.
To view the results of exercise one, click here (large file).
To view the results of exercise two, click here (large file).
To view the results of the Individual Ranking exercise, click here.

Chapter 4 – Strategies and Recommendations

Community Priorities Identified By Forum Participants

The following chart shows the results of the Individual Ranking Sheet completed by participants of the third parking forum on March 24, 2015



Begin planning process for new parking facility now

Issues

Input from various stakeholders, business owners, residents, and other participants of the parking forums included many observations, suggestions, support for, and opposition to, the need for additional public parking in downtown Amherst.

The majority of the participants of the forums expressed support for beginning a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility. Specifically, the second forum included an Individual Ranking Sheet where 84% of the participants either "strongly supported" or "supported" the Town moving forward with a process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility.

Generally speaking, the discussion about a new parking facility reveals two groups: 1) those who support it and/or believe it is necessary, and, 2) those who oppose it and/or believe it is not necessary, or should not be the Town's responsibility.

Support - Many forum participants identified that more public parking should be provided and built in order to support existing downtown uses and foster new development. Supporters of a new parking structure emphasized its importance for new economic development which is essential to keeping downtown vibrant while allowing new business growth to offset the unbalanced tax burden carried by residential property owners. Representatives from Amherst Cinema cited that their continued growth as an anchor in the downtown depends upon the creation of additional public parking. Jones Library representatives cited the need for additional public parking as being integral to convincing the State to fund 50% of the library's planned renovation/expansion. The BID cited the need for more public parking and the opportunity to create partnerships with private development. Many supporters asserted that the Town should immediately pursue a process for a new facility at the Town-owned parking lot behind CVS as a way to provide more centralized and predictable parking to support existing activity and spur new growth.

Opposition - Several of the forum participants identified that parking needs are not as significant as some claimed, and others cited the existing Municipal Parking District (MPD) zoning (which does not require parking for many downtown uses) and recently-permitted new development as the cause of any new parking problems or shortages. Several attendees expressed strong concern about Town residents being asked to pay for and/or provide public parking that would benefit the developers of private property – asserting that the Town should require that new parking be provided with new development, particularly residential development. Several of the participants opposing a new parking facility emphasized the importance of improving the existing parking situation first.

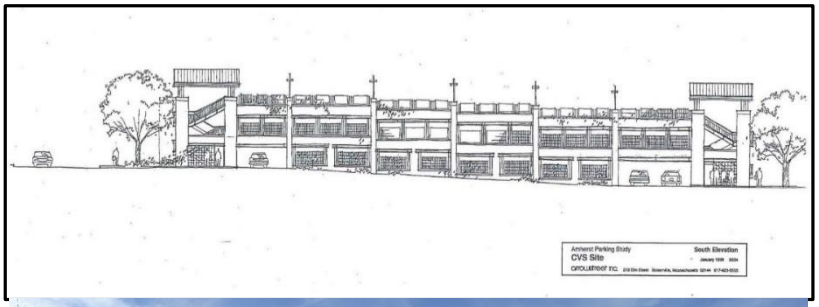
Location - Generally, the consensus in terms of a potential location for a new parking facility was the public lot behind CVS. The site contains certain features (topography, land area, access) which would accommodate a design of a multi-level structure. Additionally, in 1990, a consultant hired by the Town identified this location as most desirable for a parking facility. Ensuing public

processes between 1990 and 2001 ultimately led to the Amherst Redevelopment Authority (ARA) to prepare a plan for the current Boltwood Walk Parking Garage.

Updating Parking Data -The need to collect and obtain updated current data on parking supply, demand, and utilization rates was identified by people expressing support for and opposition to a new parking facility. As is stated in the Executive Summary of this report, none of the strategies or options identified in through the forum process should wait for the completion of the collection and analysis of new data. Either prong of the approach to address parking in downtown will ultimately incorporate the new data once it is obtained. To do nothing for the next 1-2 years while updated data is ascertained would be detrimental to the goal of beginning to address issues related to downtown parking.

1990 FACILITIES PLAN

Introduction – This Final Report of the Amherst Parking Study, together with Phase I Report dated January 25, 1989, documents the design analysis of proposed public parking facilities on three alternate sites in the center of town. This Report includes a schematic design of a proposed parking garage on the site known as the CVS site. This location was selected by the Amherst Parking Task Force on the basis of site analysis data included in the Phase I Report, together with other considerations important to the Town. These site analyses are in the Appendix to this report.



The proposed facility investigated in this schematic design is a garage on 3.5 levels providing 251 spaces. The garage is organized as a continuous helical ramp, rising in a clockwise direction, with two way traffic throughout. The ramp extends one-half level below grade; the top level is open parking on the garage roof so that the building typically stands two stories high. The garage is designed for metered parking without a collection booth. Other operating and revenue systems are also possible with minor changes in the garage as designed. The Financing Feasibility Study prepared by Legatt-McCall Advisors and the Traffic Study by Abend Associates are including in this Report. Adjacent surface parking [the private CVS lot] on this site adds 17 spaces, for a total of 268 spaces. The existing surface parking on this site yields about 107 spaces.

To view the 1990 Study, click here. (It is also in the appendices)

It's worth noting that that 1990 design does not incorporate or involve any other adjacent parcels. It considers one way access from North Pleasant Street and exit onto North Prospect Street. Future considerations of this site should include the potential for incorporating a parking structure as part of or in coordination with the redevelopment of property or properties along North Pleasant Street.

A benefit of such a consideration could be eliminating the need for any access to or from North Prospect Street. Additionally, with cooperative land owners, the private CVS parking area should be considered and/or incorporated to provide more flexibility in design.

MASTER PLAN (2010)
The following are objectives and strategies identified in Amherst's Master Plan related to new parking facilities:

OBJECTIVE T.5 Within the context of community transportation demand management planning, provide adequate public parking to support existing and desired new development in the downtown and elsewhere.
Amherst is a regional center for numerous outlying communities only some of which are served by public transit. Both during and after the transition away from an oil-based economy, parking for personal vehicles will continue to be a necessary form of infrastructure for the downtown, village centers, and commercial areas.

T.5.B Evaluate existing downtown public and private parking areas for reorganization, management, enhancement, or potential redevelopment as multi-modal facilities, preferably in concert with private mixed-used redevelopment of adjacent streetfront areas.
Areas to include in this evaluation include, but are not limited to, the Boltwood Walk parking garage, CVS lot, Amity Street lot, parking sites at the north end of downtown, in the interior of the East Pleasant/Triangle/Pray Street block, and the Amherst College alumni parking lot south of Spring Street.

T.5.C Plan for meeting current and future transportation demand through off-street multi-modal facilities providing a range of services.
Where appropriate, multi-modal facilities should include such amenities as:

- *Automobile parking.*
- *Public transit/shuttle stops.*
- *Full service public transit terminals.*
- *Access to rail transit.*
- *Pedestrian facilities and directional information.*
- *Bicycle parking, secure storage, and changing rooms/showers.*
- *Rentals of bicycles, Zip cars or the like.*
- *Recharging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles.*

Action items

1. Review and discuss the 1990 Facilities Study, including the process leading to the report, the design, data collected, and evaluation of sites.

2. Complete an updated, informal, evaluation of possible sites (CVS lot, Amity Street lot, second level of Boltwood Garage, Amherst College Alumni lot, others).

3. Review the process of preparing a Request for Quotation (RFQ) or a Request for Proposal (RFP) for design services.

4. Engage a consultant to prepare an updated parking inventory, utilization study, and to evaluate the need for a new parking facility. (Note: this is an integral element of both parts of the two pronged approach and would serve both purposes).

5. Consider creating a representative Parking Task Force to evaluate and determine appropriate next steps

6. Review and discuss the before and after conditions associated with the Boltwood Garage; number of spaces prior to and after construction, etc. That garage, originally proposed to contain two above ground levels, was scaled down to one basement level during the process of project development. It provides approximately 185 parking spaces (prior to construction the Boltwood Walk area contained 96 surface parking spaces).

7. Consider debt service options. Review and document the current debt service for Boltwood Garage. Analyze the potential debt service impacts of a new parking facility, using examples of municipal parking facilities funded and built in Massachusetts communities since 2000.

8. Review and consider multi-model concepts (design, funding, debt service management, etc.) in Massachusetts and beyond (e.g. Greenfield, Westfield, Springfield).

9. Review and consider multi-modal concepts and options, including but not limited to:
    - Automobile parking, public transit/shuttle stops, full service public transit terminals, access to rail transit, pedestrian facilities and directional information, Bicycle parking, secure storage, and changing rooms/showers, rentals of bicycles, Zip cars or the like, recharging stations for hybrid/electric vehicles, incorporating a public restroom.
    -
10. Encourage and/or seek public-private partnerships and cost-sharing opportunities.

11. Explore opportunities to incorporate a parking facility as part of the planned Jones Library expansion in terms of (if a certain number of spaces are to be shared with or dedicated to the library) and/or design (such as creating an enclosed walkway/connection from the library to a parking facility akin to the connection of the Northampton garage to Thornes Market).

Improve signs for public lots

Issues

The existing sign system directing users to public parking downtown is inadequate. While some recent efforts resulted in the insulation of some new parking "banners", more improvements are necessary to ensure that first time visitors can more readily find and use the existing downtown public parking spaces. The 2008 PVPC parking study highlighted that several of the public lots are underutilized. In addition to the distance of some of those lots from desired destinations, one of the reasons noted lower use was an ineffective sign system directing users to the parking area.

Action items

1. Provide larger banners for entrances to public parking lots. This should be considered in light of the other ongoing efforts to organize existing signs. Planning Department and DPW efforts (noted below) should be completed first as they can provide improvement, be evaluated for effectiveness, and highlight areas where further improvements are needed. Enhanced signage could accompany and explain any changes resulting from the implementation of demand-based pricing to lower fees in underutilized lots.

2. Re-organize and enhance signs for individual parking lots. This involves consideration of the signs once a visitor is inside a public lot. Existing signs vary widely and are often inadequate in terms of directional information as well as payment or rate information.

    a. **CVS public lot** – The CVS lot may require the most attention, including but not limited to the following:
        i. Any consideration of public signs in this lot should be accompanied by coordination with the owners of the CVS lot and the Roberts property to enhance the signs for the private parking area.
        ii. The limited parking for the patrons of the Amherst Cinema was noted numerous times during the parking forums. While vigorously pursuing options to lease or obtain the Bank of America lot, the Cinema, the Town, and the BID should consider creative wayfinding options for getting patrons from the public lot behind CVS to the Cinema. One creative option would be to create a "cinema walk" could be a way to promote a better pedestrian connection.

iii. The 2008 PVPC parking study made the following recommendation:

1. The lot is defined by signs and a series of wooden guardrails and the Town should supplement this with additional wayfinding signs, a larger municipal parking lot sign, a public awareness campaign, and additional pavement markings.

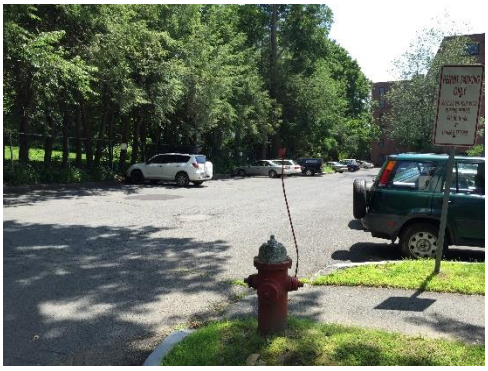
b. **Pray Street lot** – In addition to the need for entrance signs (both from East Pleasant Street and from Triangle Street) the interior signs need to be upgraded. While the lot is fairly small, it is surrounded by private lots. Both the public lot and private lots require upgraded signs to provide more clarity for visitors as to where the public parking is located and the cost. This lot has several components; it's metered, a portion of it contains Town Center Permits, and it is one of the lots for overnight winter parking.

c. **Town Hall lot** – This is an 18 space public lot. There are no signs directing visitors to this lot from Main Street. It should no longer be the "secret spot". The lot is underutilized during afternoon and evening hours and often has open spaces when both the Spring Street and Town Common lots are full.

d. **Lower level of Boltwood Garage** – Increased and/or more effective signs are needed to indicate the existence of available parking in the lower level of the garage. Based on the 2008 data, and as can be anecdotally observed presently, while the upper level of the parking garage operates at near 100% utilization the lower level often contains open parking spaces. Additional signage should be added to better direct drivers to the lower level. This effort, combined with demand-based pricing which could lower or eliminate fees during evenings and weekends could increase use of the lower level of the garage.

NOTE: Other non-sign related ideas about the garage included beatification (such as initiating an "adopt an island" project to enhance the existing landscaping), improve lighting in the lower lever (possibly by adding LED lighting to complement the existing lights), and to continue to pursue public art installations in the garage area.

e. **Ann Whalen lot** – This is an approximately 16 space public lot located off of Kellogg Street and somewhat remote from the downtown business district. Its use is primarily by employees and citizens using the Bangs Community Center, as well as visiting service providers for the residents of the Ann Whalen and Clark House apartments. This lot contains signs completely different than other Town lots. It should be evaluated to determine whether its current limited function is appropriate or whether it should serve as a public lot.



3. The 2008 PVPC parking study provided several recommendations for signs:
    a. Review signs for existing private lots and work with owners to consider consistent new signs to indicate that free parking is restricted to customers use. Many of the signs in private lots are confusing.
    b. Consider negotiating agreements with private lot owners to enable public parking officers to issue parking citations to vehicles parked illegally in private parking lots. These citations would be issued at the owners request and would require proper signage for enforcement. The ability for visitors (often UMass commuters) to park in private lots for free and not be subject to enforcement is a primary reason that the public lots (which require users to pay) immediately adjacent to private lots are underutilized.

4. Downtown Branding & Wayfinding Design Project - In 2015, the Town in partnership with the Amherst BID was awarded a Downtown Initiative Grant for a community branding and wayfinding design project. The project will include the preparation of a sign design program and potential locations for a family of signs. It is expected that parking signs orienting visitors to the entrance of public parking areas would be a component of the program. Specific information and wayfinding signs for the interior of public parking areas or for getting pedestrians from parking areas to destinations may be required.

5. 2015 Transportation Plan – The Transportation Plan contains a recommendation for "remote parking walk connections and wayfinding". It identifies that the Town has inconsistent wayfinding and signage associated with parking areas and has no pedestrian wayfinding guidance to or from more distant parking areas. The plan identifies the following next steps:
    a. Set consistent signage and lighting standards relating to parking lots
    b. Provide updated maps and visible signage directing drivers and pedestrians to remote facilities
    c. Upgrade pedestrian infrastructure (including lighting and signs) to make remote parking feel safe and accommodating and to promote a "park-once" environment. Wayfinding signs would then be used to then help visitors find their way around on foot.

6. Since 2010, staff of the Planning Department, Department of Public Works, and the Information Technologies Department (IT) have been working cooperatively to design and locate new parking banners throughout the downtown area. Renewed focus and energy should be provided in completing the first round of these proposed sign changes and in continuing to pursue refinement and/or improvements

Make payment simpler and more predictable

Issues

Many forum participants identified the importance and desirability of allowing users/visitors the ability to assess and pay for the amount of parking they need. This typically requires payment at the end of a visit rather than up front. It creates a system where a user pays for what they need and does not have to guess on the amount of time or re-visit the meter to pay additional money. The current parking payment system require payment up front, which limits choice and creates difficulty for the users of downtown parking to avoid expired time limits.

Many of these potential actions with regard to rates and payment methods will need to respond to any future parking facility. The ability to implement this with the existing system and existing parking structure may be difficult and or limited, although a few interim options are identified.

Action items

1. Consider other high traffic areas to convert existing meters to the pay-by-space machines. In 2011, the Town installed several pay-by-the space meters. While there has been a learning curve identified in using them, they allow visitors to pay once and enable visitors to add money remotely using a smart phone. While this does raise questions and concerns about cars remaining in spots for longer than two hours, it does implement a new technology aimed at convenience. It's important to note that other communities are only beginning to study and implement this new technology which is considered a best practice for parking innovation. The Massachusetts Metropolitan Area Planning Council recently promoted a statewide procurement process for communities to obtain and install new meter technology. They identify the smart meters as enabling municipalities to manage parking more effectively by allowing prices to change by the amount of time (such as the first 15 minutes free, or a higher price the longer someone is parked) and by accommodating customers by providing multiple payment methods (including by credit card or smartphone) and allowing time to be added remotely.

   To view the MAPC presentation, click here.

2. Consider incorporating a gate/payment station in the public lot adjacent to CVS. This could allow for the Town to provide a "pay as you leave" option similar to the City of Northampton Parking garage. Many participants of the forums and online comments identify the Northampton parking garage as a model. Not only is the first hour free (a feature that a recent Northampton Parking Study is recommending be phased out), but visitors pay upon exit thus paying only for the time they use.

   The objective of this action would be to create "predictable" and flexible parking and a system whereby you pay for what you use. If this is not feasible, the concept of pay as you leave was identified as a desirable component of a future parking facility. This action would be significantly enhanced if the Town were able to acquire, or create a Joint Use agreement for the immediately adjacent private CVS lot. The idea of a validation program for CVS customers to exit the parking area for free was identified during the forum process.

   To view the recently completed Northampton Downtown Parking Management Study, click here.

3. Consider low-cost options for color coding and clearly labeling the meters. Currently there is no easy way for a driver to quickly and accurately determine the length of time allowed at each meter. While the Town has a robust online parking map, first-time visitors may not have accessed this online resource. For example, all the meters appear the same despite the different times allotted in different areas:
   a. Sellen Street has nine hour meters.
   b. Boltwood Avenue has split meters with some two hour and some five hour meters.
   c. Main Street in front of the Emily Dickinson Museum has five hour meters.

4. Consider providing additional information, promotion, and outreach on how to use the existing pay-by-space meters.

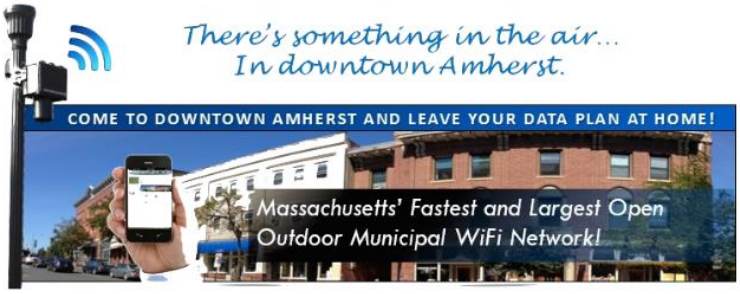
5. Vigorously enforce existing prohibitions on meter feeding. Meter feeding by employees of downtown businesses and employers is a long standing problem affecting the viability of the downtown parking system. The 2008 PVPC parking study recommended that the Town consider increased enforcement (first with warnings, then citations). Several forum participants stated that employees who meter-feed and do not park in the Town Center Permit areas provided for their use are taking away valuable on-street parking spaces which should be reserved for visitors or patrons.

6. Many forum participants noted that the ability to create a predictable parking system depended on there being an adequate supply of parking when and where it is needed. Improving the viability of downtown parking would depend on both improved management and on meaningful increases in supply.

Review smart technologies/app's

Issues

The continued advent of smart phone technology, creation of useful applications and software, and remote sensors and microchips is upon us. Efforts to incorporate new methods into everyday life and municipal government should not be ignored.



The Town boasts one of the largest open outdoor municipal WiFi networks which should be evaluated for its ability to bolster the use of smart technology in the downtown area.

Action items

1. Consider space re-setting technology that clears remaining time when a vehicle leaves the space with time remaining. This is considered a revenue generating technology.
2. Work with local technology companies and/or UMass on smart technologies for identifying empty parking spaces for visitors.
3. Continue to refine the abilities and flexibility use of pay-by-space meters. These options could allow for variable rates depending on the length of parking (cheaper for short term and tiered rates for longer parking).
4. Increase, advertise, and promote options for remote payment. More outreach is needed to educate users about the options to add time to a meter without having to visit a kiosk (something considered to be an emerging best practice).
5. Create an Amherst Parking app that could be installed and/or used by guests or visitors. This technology may allow visitors to identify vacant spots, or access enhanced locational maps, etc.
6. Increase the ability of downtown users to obtain tailored information about parking availability in different locations by improving interaction between the Town's webpage and online capabilities with those of existing businesses, social media, and business websites.

Consider different fees for metered parking

Issues

Currently, the cost to park anywhere in the downtown area of Amherst is $0.50 per hour. The cost to park in either Spring Street lot, Town Common lot, or the Amity Street lot, (the three busiest and most used parking areas) costs the same as parking in the Pray Street lot, CVS public lot, or the lower level of the garage (the three underutilized lots). This pricing structure does not provide any incentive for users to find parking outside of the lots with the highest demand.

As described in the Transportation Plan, demand-based pricing is "a system that encourages more efficient use of on-street parking". This strategy is not new. It has been previously identified as a strategy in the Master Plan, was identified during the forums, and is enumerated as a strategy in the Transportation Plan.

This strategy is an integral part of making the existing parking supply as efficient as possible and pushing visitors to use these spots – especially during the peak demands. As noted in the Transportation Plan, the high demand for on-street parking in the center of the downtown area warrants higher rates while remote areas should be discounted. The current system gives no incentive to park remotely. Those parking further away from their destinations or in lots perceived to be less desirable are penalized with the same rate and a longer walk that cuts into the allowed time limit.

The 2008 PVPC parking study identifies specific strategies for promoting and activating more parking to occur in the underutilized public lots. These strategies include but are not limited to: better signage and increased enforcement for parking on private lots (to push non-customers from the private lots to the public lots).

MASTER PLAN

- Restructure metered parking into zones with a tiered fee structure such that the most convenient parking is the most short-term and more expensive than areas further away from downtown.
- Consider applying a progressive price structure to meters with three-hour limits or more.
- Set meter rates so that a minimum percentage (15%?) of parking spaces remains open during peak periods.
- Increase parking revenue by adding meters on Town streets near University of Massachusetts.

TRANSPORATION PLAN

- Study parking utilization; identify the areas and times of highest parking demand.
- Work with community members to allay local concerns.
- Initiate 6 month demand-based pricing and extended time-limit trial period.
- Haverhill, MA case study

MAPC BEST PRACTICES

- San Francisco pilot program identified that the average price went down, reduced double parking and cruising for parking and increased parking availability.
- Provides Salem MA and San Francisco, CA as case study

The PVPC recommendations coupled with the recommendations of the Master Plan and Transportation Plan to enact demand-based pricing and enhance signs and way finding should all be pursued to gain full use and occupancy of these lots.

Efforts need to emphasize how parking is priced to encourage better use of public parking lots, as well as how to better inform visitors of the availability of parking. This can be done by incentivizing (through pricing) and informing visitors (through better signage) of the availability of parking in other public lots. Properly activating under-utilized lots may help relieve growing parking pressures long enough to allow a full public process to occur for a new parking facility.

Action items

1. Document, review and analyze the rate increases since the parking system was begun in 1999.

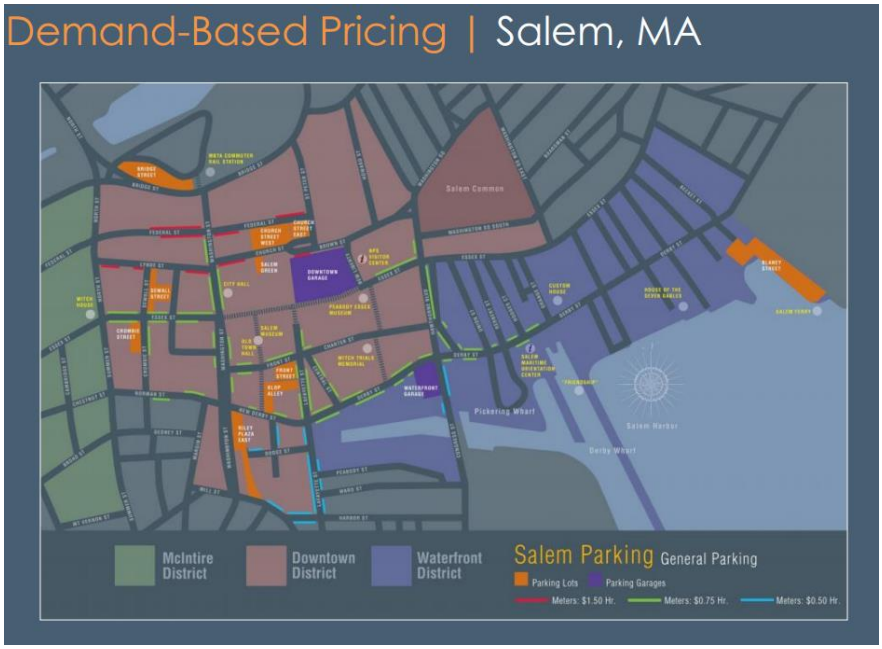
2. Review and compile other examples and meter rates for comparable towns/cities.

3. Review case studies on how altering meter rates has worked in other communities: Haverhill, MA, Salem, MA, San Francisco, CA.

4. Consider changing meter rates prior to the acquisition of new parking data. Some parking patterns are already apparent. It is clear, for example, that several of the public lots have a very high utilization rates.

5. Pursue Demand-Based Pricing options listed in the Transportation Plan:
    a. Study parking utilization; identify the areas and times of highest peak demand.
    b. Work with community members to allay local concerns.
    c. Initiate 6 month demand-based pricing and extended time-limit trial period.

6. Consider and pursue a pilot program to begin modest prices changes to the existing pay-by-space machines accompanied by minor changes to signs regarding rates, and a public outreach campaign/promotions.



Update parking data

Issues

The need to update parking data for the downtown area is an integral component to both parts of the two pronged approach of: 1) beginning a process for a new facility, and 2) evaluating and efficiently using the existing parking supply. Based on the consensus of the opinions raised at the parking forums, neither group of activities should wait for the collection and analysis of new data. Rather, those processes should begin and the new data can be used to help refine those activities as they proceed. Waiting for updated parking data is unnecessary as the existing data and the Transportation Plan provide a baseline and guidance and it would delay beginning important improvements to parking downtown.

In 2008, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission conducted a parking study for the downtown area of the Town of Amherst (see Chapter One for more information). One conclusion of the study was that the overall parking supply at that time sufficiently met the overall parking demand for the entire downtown. However, the study noted that areas of greatest parking demand and supply did not coincide. Several parking lots in the south end of the downtown (the area of highest demand) had utilization rates over 100%, while other lots further from desirable destinations (in the north end and elsewhere) failed to exceed 50% utilization rates. The study provided a series of recommendations to improve the efficiency of parking in the downtown area. Since 2008 there have been a series of changes in the downtown area causing the Town to re-visit the question of whether the amount of parking downtown is adequate.

Extensive growth in existing businesses, specifically, restaurants, combined with some reductions in the overall supply have resulted in increasingly frequent instances where parking demand exceeds supply in the most desirable and easily accessed areas. In addition, the growth and expansion of a key downtown landmark, Amherst Cinema, has highlighted the problems centered on a lack of parking in key locations.

PARKING FORUM INPUT

The individual ranking sheet completed as an exercise at the third parking forum indicates that obtaining updated data on parking – in terms of an updated inventory and utilization rates - would be strongly supported.

2015 TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Parking Utilization Data Program – Parking utilization data measures the level of demand for parking in an area or municipality. Utilization counts are conducted in particular areas for both on-street and off-street public and private parking and provide a measure of how many spaces are used at a given time. Utilization data allows for informed decisions to be made about parking by demonstrating where the greatest and least demand for parking is in a particular area. Data also can be used to more-accurately model future demand based on actual performance

MASTER PLAN

Strategy T.5.A – Make changes in parking polices to organize the public parking supply more efficiently.

Inventory existing downtown parking to assess current parking patterns, demand, and availability.

The potential shortage of parking has also been identified as a potentially limiting factor for the future growth and expansion of the heavily used Jones Library in the heart of downtown.

Business owners and some residents believe that parking demand now outweighs supply during peak times. Finally, recently approved residential developments are expected to add up to 120 dwelling units (with more development possible) and are not required to provide parking on-site. New occupants will utilize the existing parking options.

The growth of existing businesses, the increase in the number of dwelling units downtown, and the large number of visitors on evenings, weekends, special events, and at the beginning and end of college semesters that contribute to the need for Amherst to obtain an updated parking inventory, utilization data (supply and demand), and to review demand management strategies. The updated data will help inform the Town in pursuing a two pronged approach of addressing parking issues related to the downtown.

Action items

1. Review available parking data collection options and prepare a list of necessary information.

2. Identify funding. Prepare preliminary cost estimates for updated parking data and identify funding sources and the process required to secure funding.

3. Develop a preliminary timeline for the different elements of the project.

4. Prepare a scope of work and Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to analyze and update parking data for downtown.

5. Engage a consultant to complete the process.

Explore ways to expand the Town Center Permit system

Issues

The purpose of the Town Center Permit when it was adopted in 1999 was to preserve the prime on-street parking areas for customers, guests, and visitors while providing longer-term parking for employees and residents on the periphery of the downtown.

The large number of existing businesses and employees who use the system will likely increase as the downtown becomes more successful and developed. To support this growth, the Town should continue to explore additional areas for downtown employees and residents to park. This will also be a necessary accompaniment to any Town efforts to enforce meter feeding prohibitions.

To work as intended, the Town Center Permit system needs to provide more on-street spaces relatively close to certain destinations or areas. As the success of the downtown has grown, the need to evaluate and expand the Town Center Permit areas has increased.

Action items

1. Consider striping all of the individual Town Center Permit parking spaces. It was identified that the spaces are unmarked to allow as many cars to park in a given area as possible. However, in practice, the lack of striping has consistently created large gaps or cars parked inefficiently, which reduces the number of cars that can be parked in any given space. Marking parking spaces provides drivers specific guidance as to where to park, and increases the likelihood of drivers parking more efficiently. If necessary, striping combined with outreach (information in the Town Center Permit application materials) and enforcement could make the use of the existing spaces more efficient.

2. Consider and evaluate the snow removal policy for the downtown on-street parking areas. It is understood that clearing of snow follows an important and logical order and priority. However, failure to remove snow quickly and effectively from downtown parking areas reduces the number of spaces available and creates hazardous conditions for motorists and pedestrians.

3. Explore and consider whether creating permit parking areas is more effective than standard on-street parking, especially in residential areas. Under a permit system, such as Residential-Only permits, eligibility requirements limit who can park, making it particularly useful in controlling the impacts of UMass commuter or other commuter parking. Under simple sign parking regulations anyone can park on the street and catch a bus or walk to any distant destination (i.e. commute).

4. Explore and evaluate periphery streets and existing underutilized public lots for opportunities to create additional Town Center Permit and/or Resident-Only parking areas, including but not limited to the following:

Dickinson Street – The portion of Dickinson Street, from the intersection of Spring Street north toward Main Street currently allows parking. The restrictions are based on the parking regulations and two basic signs indicating only where parking is not allowed. It is recommended that this area be considered for an expanded area of the Town Center Permit area or a joint metered street and Town Center Permit area similar to Spring Street. This would serve the purpose of supporting new businesses or expansion of existing businesses in the area known as the "Depot Center" which includes a portion of Dickinson Street that was rezoned to Business Village Center in 2009. The small lot sizes in the area create some restrictions on new the creation of new businesses due to parking restrictions. Some employee parking could be allowed on Dickinson Street freeing up on-site parking for customers, guests, or visitors. Alternatively, as more businesses develop in Depot Center, it should be understood that at some point, on-street permit spaces may need to be converted to metered public spaces available to the public.

CVS lot – As identified in the 2008 PVPC report, the public lot adjacent to the CVS lot contains approximately 71 parking spaces. During the study period in 2008, the highest utilization rate reached was 51% from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. This area, along with a recommendation that it be considered for a pilot winter parking program, lends itself to consideration as a Town Center Permit area.

An arrangement whereby a certain number of parking spaces could have a dual metered and Town Center Permit arrangement allowing visitors and patrons to have access to the area along with Town Center Permit holders should be considered. It is anticipated that the creation of Town Center Permit in even a portion of this centrally located parking area would increase the utilization rate. An additional recommendation of the 2008 PVPC parking study recommends considering reserving a portion of this lot solely for municipal employees and/or municipal services. It cites the services in the vicinity including the fire station, library, museum, and Bangs Center and identifies that by parking municipal employee vehicles in this location, it would free up available public parking in other areas. Action on any of these recommendations would need to be incorporated into enhancement of signs for this public lot, as recommended in another section.

Lincoln Avenue – Two areas of Lincoln Avenue have been identified as areas of concern related to parking.

Southern portion of Lincoln (Between Amity Street and Gaylord Street) - The section of Lincoln Avenue south of Amity Street between Gaylord Street and Amity Street is used for unregulated parking along the east side. Portions of this stretch could potentially link the Permit area established on Gaylord Street to the existing Permit areas along Amity Street. The 2008 PVPC parking report identified the permit parking along Amity as having very high utilization (between 85% -104%) from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Existing and expanded business activity in this area and its close proximity to downtown make expansion of permit parking into this area worth considering. For example, the distance from the intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Amity Street to the intersection of North Pleasant Street and Main Street (Bank of America) is approximately 1,080 feet. Conversely, the popular existing permit parking area on Spring Street adjacent to the First Congregational Church is approximately 1,380 feet. This implies that it could provide new permit parking within a reasonable walking distance to destinations downtown.

The northern portion of Lincoln Avenue (from Amity Street to Elm Street) **-** The section of Lincoln Avenue from Amity Street north to Elm Street is also used for unregulated parking on both sides of the road. The southern portion of the street is a reasonable walking distance to downtown whereas the middle portion is a longer but reasonable walk to the University of Massachusetts. The same considerations noted in the previous section should be considered along with consideration as to the viability of expanding the Resident-Only Permit parking system on some or all of this portion. The southern portion may be appropriate for Town Center Permit parking.

Seelye Street and Webster Street – Seelye Street is one way and has Town Center Permit parking on both sides. This seems to work well and to provide proper maneuverability. Webster Street is a narrow street which is open to two way traffic. Parking commonly occurs on one side and is not regulated by any signs, permits, or observable restrictions. Access and maneuverability on this street is severely limited. This street should be evaluated and consideration given to limiting it to one way traffic, removing parking, or a combination of one or the other.

5. Increase dual use areas (meters and permits) – In 2012, this strategy was implemented on the north side of Spring Street. It should be reviewed for effectiveness in both regulating parking and providing multiple options to park. If it is successful, consideration should be given to its application in other locations.

6. Evaluate parking regulations for other periphery streets near the downtown and University. Although it is outside of the scope of downtown parking, the evaluation of parking regulations for other periphery streets is recommended due to the potential for conflicts between residents and/or commuters when or if other areas become controlled through Permit parking and UMass commuters are forced to seek out new options.

7. In some cases the existing on-street parking may be acceptable while in other cases it may create a hazard for pedestrians or proper vehicular movement. Current parking regulations should be evaluated for the following streets:
    a. High Street/Taylor Street/Gray Street – evaluate for use and safety; possible Resident-Only areas.
    b. Brigham Street – evaluate for unregulated use.
    c. Fearing Street (metered section adjacent to UMass) – evaluate for revenue generation.
    d. Nutting/Allen Street Resident-Only areas – evaluate for effectiveness/use.
    e. McClellan Resident-Only areas – evaluate for effectiveness/use.

Promote use of Town Center Permit parking after 5:00 p.m.

Issues

After 5:00 p.m. on a daily basis and all day on the weekends the parking spaces within the Town Center Permit areas become available for parking by users without a permit. Some of the parking spaces closest to the downtown area could be utilized by patrons, customers, and visitors during the evenings and on weekends – if they knew it was available as an option.

Promoting the availability of these spaces after 5:00 p.m. should be pursued as a way to make available additional parking during evenings and weekends. This is a potential way to offset some of the demand during these times. While some perceptive residents may already be aware of this, outreach should target visitors and patrons coming to downtown for the first time or are infrequent visitors such as diners or patrons going to a movie. These areas are abundantly located in relatively close proximity to certain prime destinations. The 2008 PVPC study suggests that utilization of many of the Town Center Permit areas drops off significantly between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. (this corresponds to the end of the work day for a typical office or retail employee). For example, the study indicates that the Town Center Permit parking area along the north side of Amity Street between North Prospect and Lincoln Avenue goes from a 92% utilization rate between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to a 73% utilization rate from 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. and the south side along Amity goes from 104% between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 50% utilization from 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. There are other similar examples elsewhere. Promotion and raising awareness of this option for parking should be vigorously pursued as a way to provide additional parking during the evenings and weekends.

2008 PVPC STUDY

Overflow Parking Signs –
It is recommended that the Town of Amherst implement signage that directs patrons to permit parking areas during free parking times, on weekends, and during special events. Permit parking [in some Town Center Permit lots] never exceeds 50% utilization rates throughout the entire day. Signage directing traffic to these under-utilized areas will alleviate congestion during the weekends and after 5:00 p.m. when permit parking is available to the general public.

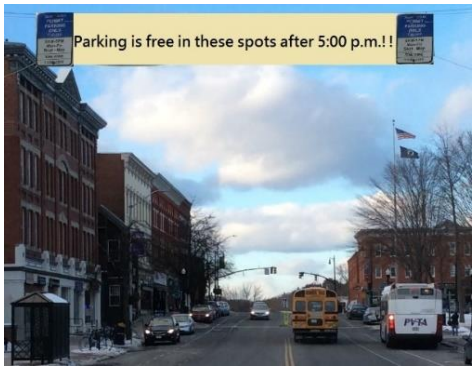
Action items

Explore options for promoting the use of the Town Center areas after 5:00 p.m., including but not limited to:

1. The 2008 PVPC study provided a recommendation for the Town to initiate a "public awareness campaign". Any effort under this section would meet that recommendation. Other aspects of the 2008 recommendation included:
    a. Information on preferred public parking areas
    b. Dangers of illegally parking in private lots
    c. Identify overflow parking areas
    d. Use of local media to highlight and alert the public to changes

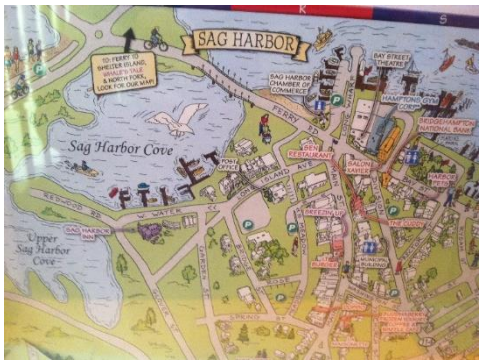
2. Identify and highlight this option on the Town website.

3. Create a re-usable banner to be installed over North Pleasant Street promoting this option and hang on certain key evenings or weekends when no other banner is up.



4. Work with the BID and Chamber to promote this option on the mini banners recently erected on downtown light posts.

5. Consider creation of a "Discover Amherst Map" which could fulfill multiple purposes; a primary objective could be to promote the downtown area and businesses; a secondary goal could be to help map parking for visitors.



6. The 2015 Transportation Plan provided a recommendation for "remote parking walk connections and wayfinding". The creation of a set of pedestrian oriented maps to illustrate walking routes from certain parking areas to destinations could be produced by the Town and used by local merchants. This could include the Town Center Permit areas and the maps could be part of the Towns website resources.

7. Work with business owners, the BID, and the Chamber to provide links from enhanced Town of Amherst website resources related to parking to the websites and social media outlets used by existing businesses especially where destination specific resources are available. Amherst Cinema already provides this type of information on their webpage.

Re-establish a Parking Commission, Task Force, or similar group

Issue

The issues related to downtown parking are complex, involve multiple property owners and stakeholders, and are intertwined with various regulations controlled by different authorities. . Creating significant changes to one set of regulations could result in unintended consequences. Additionally, gathering and understanding the often disparate needs and requirements of the involved stakeholders, residents, and Town officials warrants the re-establishment of a group charged with considering changes to Amherst's downtown parking regulations.

Action items

1. Emulating the success of the Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Working Group and the Town-Gown Steering Committee, establish an advisory body composed of Town staff, residents, business owners and /or stakeholders to advise the Town on downtown parking policy changes.

2. The composition of such a group should be determined by the Town Manager, and could include representatives from the Select Board, Planning Board, Public Works Committee, town staff, residents, and business owners.

3. One of the goals of the group would be to refine the recommendations in this report and work towards their implementation.

Review/revise Municipal Parking District requirements

Issues

As described in previous chapters, the Municipal Parking District (MPD) is an innovative zoning tool which has existed in the Downtown area for decades. It exempts certain uses from the requirement to provide parking.

The parking requirements and regulations governing the Municipal Parking District (MPD) need to be re-examined in response to new development, the results of the parking forums, Transportation Plan recommendations, and referral of citizen parking petition amendments back to the Planning Board. To view the Planning Board Report to Town Meeting, click here.

The Transportation Plan identifies "unbundled parking" as a recommendation describing it as when a residential unit is sold or leased independent of any required or onsite parking. This is essentially what the Municipal Parking District already does. The Planning Board should further explore how unbundled parking can be incorporated into Amherst's zoning regulations. A Municipal Parking District or its equivalent is considered a best practice for the regulation of parking in downtown areas. In 2012, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission presenting Zoning Tools to Promote Economic Development in Your Town Center which includes removal of parking requirements as a best practice.

Action items

1. Evaluate how parking is regulated in the Municipal Parking District and contributes to or hinders the success of downtown Amherst.

2. Review and document the current use of the Municipal Parking District, whether internally or as part of updated parking data.

ZONING SUBCOMMITTEE (ZSC)

The ZSC is a subcommittee of the Planning Board whose primary responsibility is to review, consider, and prepare amendments to the Zoning Bylaw. Since the conclusion of the forums, the ZSC has begun to review and consider potential changes to the Municipal Parking District.

PLANNING BOARD

The Planning Board is required to hold public hearings on all amendments to the Zoning Bylaw. The complexity of the issues related to parking should be fully articulated. To ensure that there is enough time to prepare a sound amendment and to undertake necessary public outreach, an appropriate timeline for amendments should be considered.

TOWN MEETING

Town Meeting considers and votes to adopt proposed changes to the Zoning Bylaw. The review of the Municipal Parking District is confined to the Zoning Bylaw and would therefore be reviewed by the Planning Board. Any resulting change to the Zoning Bylaw must be approved by 2/3 vote of Amherst Town Meeting. The nature of parking and how different users and stakeholders view the need and purpose of parking very different, sufficient time to reach agreement and to educate should be considered for significant amendments to the Municipal Parking District.

3. Examine and explore how the recommendations of the Transportation Plan relate to the Municipal Parking District or shared parking in terms of the Zoning Bylaw. Specifically, the recommendations, Best Practice examples, and resources cited in the following sections should be considered:
    a. Unbundled Parking
    b. Revised Parking Standards
    c. Car Share Expansion
    d. Shared Parking District
    e. Commercial Loading Zone Regulations

4. Review and document the interaction between the Municipal Parking District and other aspects of the parking system. For example, if parking is not provided, where do employees, customers, and residents currently park?

5. The Planning Board should proceed to work on considering revisions to the Municipal Parking District regulations. As of the writing of this Report, the ZSC has begun to discuss zoning amendment options that will require vetting, review, definitions, and testing. These include:
    f. Parking space requirements for certain uses
    g. Fees-in-lieu
    h. Shared or leased parking
    i. Shared-car or bike use
    j. Off-site parking
    k. Design criteria for off-street parking facilities.

6. Evaluation how any proposed zoning amendments relate to or impact non-zoning options or measures. For example, the recently completed (April 2015) Transportation Plan and the parking forums have identified several non-zoning options including:
    l. Demand–Based Pricing
    m. Increasing Town Center Permit areas
    n. Special Event Management
    o. Parking Benefit District

7. Engage the public throughout. During the assessment the Town should engage stakeholders, business owners, residents, and property owners. It is essential that the process is open and contain a timeline sufficient for educating Town Meeting members.

8. Obtain current parking data. The need for an updated parking inventory, utilization study, and management recommendations is discussed in another section and should be considered as part of the process to amend regulations.

Review the winter parking ban in the Town Center Permit areas

Issues

The existing Town Center Permit Regulations allow permit holders to park overnight between April 1st and November 30th. However, parking overnight between 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. is prohibited from December 1st through April 1st regardless of whether there is snow on the ground or in the forecast. This causes residents, in particular, to find alternate arrangements to park overnight for five months out of the year. The two areas available for overnight parking in the winter are the public Pray Street lot and the lower level of the parking garage.

The parking forum identified that the proximity of the available parking is often too far to create proper utilization.

The enforcement of the overnight winter parking ban has been identified as inconsistent which causes confusion amongst users as they can sometimes park overnight with no consequence and other times be ticketed or towed. It also prevents the Town from obtaining accurate data on the number of cars parking overnight in the winter.

Action items

1. Review and consider the current function, purposes, and need for the winter parking ban.

2. Evaluate whether the existing or proposed winter parking regulations will encourage or discourage additional residential uses downtown.

3. Evaluate and compare the current policy to winter parking policies of other comparable cities or Towns. Northampton and Worcester both utilize a system whereby parking is prohibited on-street during identified snow emergencies, rather than applying a prohibition throughout the entire winter. Other communities utilize an alternate side of the street system whereby parked vehicles are required to move at time intervals to allow clearing of snow.

4. Explore alternative winter parking locations. The number of parking spaces in the basement of the garage is 80 spaces not counting the reserved spaces. The Pray Street lot contains 32 parking spaces. Based on data from 2014, there were 150 Town Center Permits sold to residents. If residences are desirable downtown, alternatives which support parking overnight in the winter should be sought.

5. Develop and pursue a pilot winter overnight parking arrangement in the underutilized portion of the CVS lot or an agreed upon street. A pilot program in coordination with the DPW and with proper education and participation from Permit users could help examine options, identify difficulties, and inform future decisions.

6. If no other solutions are found to be viable, more fully enforce the winter parking ban. This would include follow through on ticketing and requiring permit holders to use the two designated parking areas. If enforced, it could be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. If this option is pursued, it should be accompanied by a public awareness campaign to educate and inform permit holders of new enforcement and publicize and promote the overnight parking locations.

Consider alternative options to increase public parking supply

Issues

A portion of this report references revising the regulations for shared parking. These references relate to the regulations pertaining to private land owners and new development. As part of the two pronged approach (1. to begin a planning process to explore the need for and feasibility of a new parking facility, and, 2. undertake strategies and efforts to maximize the efficiency and availability of existing parking supply), the Town should thoroughly examine and vigorously pursue any viable options to lease or obtain access to private lots to create additional existing surface parking for use as public parking. The Town should expect to incur costs to lease or purchase the rights to existing private lots (and to make some physical improvements such as access, striping, meters, etc.). However, the costs to gain access to existing lots would be significantly less than constructing new lots. In each and every case the Town would require cooperation with a willing property owner – which is one of the biggest hurdles in considering any public use of private parking.

This report does not constitute a thorough examination of all the options.

Action Items

1. Identify and assess all options for the Town to share, lease, or create Joint-Use Agreements, or any other options, to create additional public parking without new construction.

2. Purchase or obtain a Joint Use Agreement for the use of the Bank of America lot. The Bank of America is an approximately 47 space parking lot adjacent to the Public Amity Street lot. As identified in the 2008 PVPC study, the Public Amity Street lot frequently reaches 97% utilization rates while the adjacent private lot for Bank of America achieved occasional usage of 60%. The Town should vigorously pursue obtaining this lot through purchase or to achieve a joint use agreement with the goal of the Town to have full or limited use as a public lot.

3. Pursue a Joint Use Agreement with the owner of the Douglas Funeral Home for use of tis rear private parking lot. The rear parking area of the Douglas Funeral Home is often un-occupied. With minor modifications to the site, this underutilized lot would be ideal for providing leased public parking during certain periods and while retaining the property owner's needs. The proximity of this lot adjacent to the Boltwood Garage, and with potential two way access from Boltwood Walk and approximately 20 parking spaces, make this an option to consider and pursue cooperatively with the property owner.

4. Explore expanded use of the Alumni lot at Amherst College. The lot provides for a range of parking needs for Amherst College but may provide possibilities for lease by the Town during evenings and some weekends. This is also a lot to be considered for special event parking.

5. Explore expanded use of the rear parking lot of the commercial block on the north side of Triangle. This parking area is identified as being underutilized in the 2008 PVPC parking study. The Town should pursue a leased parking management agreement with the property owner. The benefit of a lease agreement is that it frees the owner from responsibility and liability for the parking area, and the terms and length of a lease could preserve the owner's ability to use the parking as part of future development of the site.

6. Explore expanded use of other private parking lots. An example is the parking lot at Cousins Market. Per the 2008 PVPC parking study, this lot achieved a 79% utilization rate between 11:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. but use of the lot dropped to 32% between 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. This represents a prime example where shared parking should be pursued in the form of a lease with the Town to allow public parking during the evenings, for example.

Create a Special Event Parking program

Issues

The Town of Amherst is a tourist destination. It organizes and hosts many large events throughout the year which draw crowds from the region, many of whom are first time or occasional visitors to the Town. It is essential for some or all of the large events that the Town, in coordination with the BID and the Chamber, create a Special Event parking program to accommodate the large influx of visitors on these occasions.

The public parking, as described herein, is either over utilized during peak times or underutilized due to its location. Additionally, the fact that over 50% of the parking in the downtown is on private property, increases the importance of providing a coordinated shared parking and sign program for larger events.

Some of the larger events drawing thousands of visitors to Amherst include:

- The Taste of Amherst
- The Merry Maple
- The Block Party
- Extravaganja
- Amherst Rotary Community Fair/carnival
- The Daffodil Fun Run race

2008 PVPC STUDY

Overflow Parking Signs –It is recommended that the Town of Amherst implement signage that directs patrons to permit parking areas during free parking times, on weekends, and during special events.

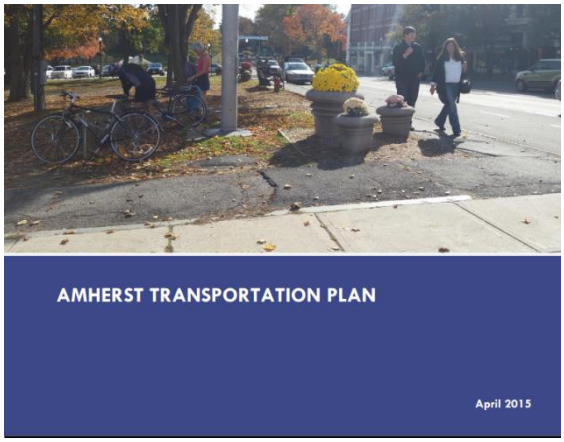
2015 TRANSPORATION PLAN

Event management programs are designed to allow cities and towns to better leverage and mange parking facilities during large events. Using such a system, a town can prevent excessive parking on residential streets proximate to the event site and find partners to share reserve supply for patrons, especially during after-work hours. For events that occur regularly, such as sports events, concerts, or other large events, a town can create parking districts that allow for permitted parking on public streets. Further, the Town can charge variable rates to both manage high parking demand, and raise revenues to pay for the program.

Action Items:

1. Create a partnership between the Town (DPW, Police, others), BID, Chamber of Commerce to create a Special Event Program.
2. Actively pursue agreements with certain private property owners to provide parking located in close proximity to events.
3. Consider shuttle options from in-town locations; bolster the use of the Amherst Trolley.
4. Create a temporary sign program to help direct visitors to extra parking.
5. Enlist volunteers/ambassadors to direct traffic or provide information in key locations.
6. Promote and provide outreach for alternative parking areas.
7. Follow the recommendations in the Transportation Plan:
    a. Determine necessary signing and regulatory changes to allow improved access to remote event parking areas
    b. Develop an event parking website and program
    c. Coordinate with town partners such as UMass and Amherst College to identify remote event parking locations
    d. Develop an incentive program to allow some parking on nearby residential streets as needed.

2015 Transportation Plan recommendations



Completed in April of 2015, the Town-wide Transportation Plan is intended as a living framework to guide the Town in a suitable manner that intelligently and rationally addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing transportation system. It makes recommendations for needed transportation planning, programming, and operations improvements today, tomorrow, and in the long-term in several areas:

- Public bus and rail transit systems
- Alternative transportation systems
- Roadway system
- Traffic circulation
- Traffic calming
- Vehicle parking
- Intermodal connections
- Transportation needs of the business community, village centers, and neighborhoods
- Connections to communities neighboring Amherst.

The vision statement developed by volunteer members of the Town's Transportation Plan Task Force is:

> *The Amherst Transportation Plan will create an economically and environmentally sustainable, multi-model transportation system that accommodates all members of the Amherst community. The Plan will provide for the safe, convenient, and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the Town and connecting with other communities.*

In terms of parking, the Transportation Plan should be considered more of a broad brush review of the downtown area. The Plan combined with the information gathered in the forums and this Report, will provide a specific set of strategies and options for addressing parking in the downtown areas. The Transportation Plan contains the following topics and <u>findings of need</u>:

- **Revise Parking Standards** – The Town needs greater flexibility in how parking needs are determined and met. The municipal parking district in downtown is a great tool for advancing this flexibility, but it lacks clear guidance on the principals of shared parking, how to encourage a park-once environment, and how liability and maintenance could be shared.
- **Car Share Expansion** – The potential benefits of having car share pods accessible in downtown and in village centers are notable, given the ongoing high parking demands in Amherst.
- **Vanpool/Carpool Program** – Despite current options, Amherst lacks a central forum where smaller businesses can point their employees to find commute partners. An official rideshare matching site is needed to allow Amherst residents a trusted place to meet other commuters.

- **Unbundled Parking** – The Town, in the aim of creating a more equitable and affordable place to live, should not prescribe how many spaces a developer or its residents will use. Rather, it should enable residents to select the amount of parking they need.
- **Demand-Based Pricing** – The Town has high demand for on-street parking in the center of the downtown area that would warrant higher rates; meanwhile, remote metered spaces are not discounted and still have a time limit, discouraging their use by those willing to park more remotely to open up core spaces.
- **Event Management Program** – Amherst's various events throughout the year notably impact the availability of on-street parking, and patrons regularly complain about a lack of parking.
- **Remote Parking Incentive** – Growing downtown parking demand includes a large amount of long-term employees or regular visitors who could park remotely and rideshare, walk, or take transit into the Center. No such facilities or incentives exist.
- **Parking Benefit District** – With high parking demand and meters already in place, Amherst is ripe for improved parking management options. Demand-based pricing will lead to greater revenues which should be reinvested in the places where the fees are collected.
- **Remote Parking Walk Connections and Wayfinding** – Signage in Amherst needs to be consistent and visible so that visitors and residents alike can easily navigate to and from remote parking areas. These areas need to be accessible for pedestrians with consistent lighting and upgraded pedestrian infrastructure.
- **Shared Parking District** – With a popular downtown area, there is often limited parking availability, and there is not sufficient room for surface lots to be easily added to the downtown area. A shared parking program with clear monitored thresholds for when new parking is needed will help Amherst accommodate its vision for development in the north end of downtown.
- **Parking Utilization Data Program** – In its parking forums, Amherst lacks a current picture of parking demand that can easily be mapped and interpreted by residents. To accurately understand current needs and project future demand, the Town needs more recent count data, which should be collected at regular intervals in the future in order to compare how parking demands shift over time.
- **Commercial Loading Zone Regulations** – Downtown Amherst currently suffers from unregulated truck traffic. Steps to improve delivery outcomes should be created, but should additionally not place an undue burden on local businesses.

Where applicable, this Report has identified and incorporated the recommendations of the Transportation Plan. Consideration by the Select Board or Planning Board of recommendations in the Transportation Plan should include detailed review of the "best practice" examples listed under each section.

To view the entire Transportation Plan, click here. (NOTE: This is a large file and may take a few minutes to download).