



MEMORANDUM

To: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager
From: Downtown Parking Working Group – Christine Gray-Mullen (Chair), Wendy Jones Boisseau, Sarah la Cour, Catharine Porter, Sharon Povinelli, and Connie Kruger (non-voting member)
Date: Thursday, November 14, 2019
Re: Downtown Parking Working Group Priority Recommendations for Nelson\Nygaard's 2019 Parking Implementation Strategy

INTRODUCTION

This memo recommends the priority action steps of the Downtown Parking Working Group (DPWG), based on the Nelson\Nygaard Parking Implementation Strategy. The DPWG anticipates that the Town will use this report as a guide for improving the downtown parking system and that each specific recommendation be reviewed and discussed in a public setting, and adjusted as necessary before adopting any changes.

BACKGROUND

The DPWG was formed in 2016 to present prioritized parking recommendations to the parking regulatory body (formerly the Select Board, now the Town Council). In 2018, Amherst re-engaged parking consultants Nelson\Nygaard to: update the parking utilization data, identify problem areas in the town's parking system, and recommend best practices to make parking easier, more efficient, and more available. Nelson\Nygaard conducted a parking utilization analysis to identify changes since the 2016 study, performed a future parking demand analysis, and drafted an implementation strategy that took into account conversations with stakeholders and the public.

On April 11, 2019, Nelson\Nygaard held a public forum to present key issues and potential opportunities and gather feedback. The consultants presented updated parking data, identified issues, trouble areas, and aspects of the parking system in need of improvement, as well as activities to help Nelson\Nygaard better understand the public perception of parking in Amherst. Following the forum, the consultants drafted a Key Issues and Opportunities report that was further refined into the 2019 Parking Implementation Strategy.

On August 28, 2019, Nelson\Nygaard held a second public forum at which the issues, goals, and strategies from the Draft Parking Implementation Strategy was presented to the public. The consultants assimilated the public feedback into the final report which accompanies this memo.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The final Parking Implementation Strategy contains numerous recommendations that vary in complexity of execution, cost, and impact. However, there are three key strategies that the DPWG recommends the Town prioritize immediately. These strategies were prioritized because they create a single person with responsibility for the parking system, develop a funding mechanism to make parking, streetscape, and transportation improvements, and meaningful steps that can be taken immediately to improve the parking system.

- 1. Create a dedicated parking management position in charge of all transportation policy, planning and implementation (Strategy 1A).**

The DPWG strongly recommends implementation of this recommendation as soon as possible. The parking position will be responsible for implementation of the strategy, coordination amongst internal and external stakeholders, and communication of parking changes affecting the public. Creating this leadership position early is critical to ensure that a staff person exists to organize parking efforts internally and create a single point of contact with whom parking system users and other stakeholders can engage.

- 2. Create a dedicated funding source to pay for downtown parking and transportation improvements.**

In order to fund the changes necessary to create a well-functioning parking system, the Town must dedicate a recurring source of funds for improvements such as additional pay-by-plate kiosks, license plate reader technology, and parking management personnel. The consultant's Parking Implementation Strategy recommends a Parking Benefit District, which would be funded from parking revenue and could only be spent within the defined boundary of the District. The DPWG recognizes that parking revenue already goes into a Transportation Fund and can only be spent on transportation related costs. The DPWG believes that it is imperative that as much of the parking revenues as possible be dedicated to parking and transportation improvements *in the downtown*, whether that be through the creation of a Parking Benefits District, or by reserving a percentage of the Transportation Fund for improvements to the downtown parking system.

- 3. Implement high visibility and consistent signage in key locations (Strategy 7A) and update the Town's parking webpage to be more user-friendly (see Key Action 1.B.5).**

The DPWG sees these recommendations for physical and online improvements as highly impactful and relatively easy to implement. Improving key signage, including directional signage to larger parking lots (Boltwood and North Pleasant, in particular) and larger ParkMobile zone numbers that are visible from vehicles, will help visitors and customers more easily navigate the parking system and reduce frustrations immediately.

CONCLUSION

The DPWG was originally intended to be a 1-year working group to prioritize parking recommendations to the Select Board. As the group learned about the complexities of parking in general, and the particulars of the Amherst parking system, the working group's effort was extended into a multi-year commitment that oversaw the hiring and work of Nelson\Nygaard's most recent (2019) work.

With the submission of the final Nelson\Nygaard Implementation Strategy and this memorandum, the DPWG sees its charge completed. The DPWG is aware that the Parking Implementation Strategy calls for the continuation of this working group, or a similar committee (see Strategy 1.B). The DPWG recommends that the Town Council carefully consider how best to move forward to establish a permanent town-wide parking advisory committee.

The DPWG would like to thank the Select Board, the Town Council, the Town Manager, parking stakeholders, members of the public who participated in the process, the business community, and Town staff (especially Senior Planner Nate Malloy, Collector Jennifer LaFountain, and Economic Development Director Geoff Kravitz) for their support of this effort to improve Amherst's downtown parking system. The DPWG is proud of the work it has done to understand, evaluate, and make recommendations to improve the downtown parking system. The DPWG looks forward to seeing the Town Council and Town Manager implement these recommendations.

DPWG MEMBERS

- Christine Gray-Mullen (Chair)
- Wendy Jones Boisseau
- Sarah la Cour
- Catharine Porter
- Sharon Povinelli

Former Select Board member Connie Kruger resigned from the DPWG in February 2019, but has remained engaged with the DPWG as a non-voting member since that time.