

**INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
ADVISORY PANEL REPORT
SPOKANE WASHINGTON
NOVEMBER 7-10, 2001**

INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) and the Business Improvement District (BID), with support from the City of Spokane, engaged the International Downtown Association (IDA) to conduct an IDA Advisory Panel focused on downtown parking issues. The panel took place beginning Thursday evening, November 7, and concluded with a report to the Parking Advisory Committee on Saturday morning, November 10.

The purpose of the panel was two-fold: (1) to assess the current downtown parking situation in Spokane and how it supports the revitalization goals of the City of Spokane, Downtown Spokane Partnership and the Business Improvement District; and (2) to create a strategic framework to guide future actions and proposed changes in the downtown parking system.

The IDA ADVISORY PANEL

David Feehan, President of the International Downtown Association, served as advisory panel team leader. He was joined by:

Clayton Johnston -- Executive Director, Toledo (OH) Downtown Parking Authority

Rod Keeling – Executive Director, Downtown Tempe (AZ) Community, Inc.

Chris Luz – Vice President and Director of Parking, HNTB

Davis Sanders – President, Foresite RDG

Clayton Johnston, in addition to directing the Toledo Downtown Parking Authority, chaired the Kalamazoo Downtown Development Authority and Downtown Kalamazoo Inc., which together staffed and managed the widely recognized Kalamazoo downtown parking system. Rod Keeling currently manages downtown parking on behalf of the City of Tempe. Chris Luz is one of the foremost parking experts in the U.S., and has published numerous articles on parking. Davis Sanders is a leading strategic planner and architect, and has recently developed an innovative web-based parking information system for the City of Des Moines (IA).

The panel process consisted of a series of large and small meetings designed to secure both a broad range of opinions and current information from downtown stakeholders. These included property owners and retailers, office tenants, city and other public officials, and other interested citizens.

Panel members reviewed an extensive range of documents and toured downtown both on foot and by van.

The findings and recommendations included in this report represent the unanimous conclusions of the panel unless specifically noted. It is important to remember that this panel was designed to provide the Downtown Spokane Partnership and the City of Spokane with a strategic framework for decision-making; in other words, a fresh way of thinking about downtown parking and making well-informed decisions. The panel did not undertake a parking study in the formal sense; however, this report should serve as a basis for deciding what additional information will be required as the downtown Spokane community begins to re-think and re-shape its current parking system.

BACKGROUND

Spokane has seen significant renewed interest in its downtown during the past decade. Perhaps the centerpiece of this renewed interest is River Park Square, an urban shopping, dining, and entertainment center, which opened in August 1999. Another major development on the periphery of downtown is the Riverpoint campus, which expects to accommodate 7,000 students.

But these mega-projects are not the only additions to downtown. The Steam Plant is a unique adaptive re-use project providing Spokane with a “must-see” historic office and restaurant complex. The Davenport Hotel, with more than 280 rooms, will reopen soon, after a total renovation. In addition, there have been a number of other noteworthy public and private investments in downtown, and plans for more, including the Fox Theater, an expanded Convention Center, and a 19-story office tower.

As these developments have occurred, the downtown parking supply has not kept pace with demand, despite the expansion of the River Park Square garage, which currently provides 1304 parking spaces. Much of the unmet demand is for close-in employee parking, and River Park Square is not currently able to meet much of this demand, due to restrictions imposed by retail tenant agreements.

In response to this shortage, the Downtown Spokane Partnership has created and marketed the City Ticket peripheral parking program, encouraging downtown employees to park outside the core area. The City of Spokane also promotes peripheral parking, leasing land underneath the freeway and contracting with Diamond Parking for day-to-day operations.

The City provides 2852 on-street, metered spaces. Meters range from 15 minutes to 10 hours and are enforced from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Meter enforcement varies in aggressiveness, but some downtown leaders view enforcement as overly aggressive.

There appears to be a shortage of parking in some areas of downtown, and a surplus in some other areas – a very common situation in many downtowns. Without a current

supply-demand study, this assumption is based on observation and anecdote. However, there are significant waiting lists for certain parking facilities.

The public perception of downtown parking seems to be mixed. Surveys reflect a Spokane community that generally finds downtown parking a moderate to substantial barrier to downtown use. During the panel process, several participants commented on the negative perception of downtown parking, and noted the perceived aggressiveness of some downtown meter-checkers. Perhaps most telling is the fact that recent surveys listed parking as the most important obstacle to the continued growth and vitality of downtown Spokane.

THE IDA PANEL PROCESS/SCHEDULE

IDA panelists met with a wide range of downtown and city leaders. The following is a brief summary of those meetings:

November 7 – Evening meeting with DSP, BID, and MPO representatives

November 8 – Breakfast open forum; approximately 50 attendees

Session I – DSP and BID board members

Session II – City Staff

Session III – Tour of downtown and parking facilities

Session IV – River Park Square garage representatives

Session V – City Council

Session VI – Council and downtown leaders

November 9 – Session VII – City Staff

Session VIII – Parking Steering Committee

Session IX – Panel Working Session

Session X – Presentation of Preliminary Findings to DSP leaders

Session XI – Panel Working Session

Session XII – Mayor John Powers

Session XIII – Final Panel Working Session

November 10 – Final Presentation

IDA PANEL GENERAL FINDINGS

- Downtown Spokane is a relatively strong business district with many assets and great potential. It is the region's primary business district and defines the region's economy, image, and quality of life. It serves a market of 1.7 million people in Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, Northern Idaho, and Western Montana.

Assets:

- The Center of a four-state economy
 - An impressive inventory of historic buildings
 - A group of dedicated downtown leaders
 - An effective downtown program supported by a BID
 - An outstanding retail and entertainment center, River Park Square
 - An enviable cultural and entertainment component, including the Opera House, Fox and Met theaters, and the 20-screen AMC Cinema
 - A number of excellent fine dining and casual restaurants
 - Some unique locally-owned shops (e.g., Auntie's Bookstore and Boo Radley's)
- Potential Opportunities make downtown worthy of public and private investment.

Opportunities:

- Improve the performance of office and retail space
- Convert a number of pedestrian-unfriendly one-way streets to two-way, pedestrian-friendly streets
- Improve the management, image, and financial performance of the public parking system
- Expand residential development

The panelists believe that while the assets listed above provide opportunities for downtown parking to grow and expand, the potential opportunities listed above will also increase demand for downtown parking. One member of the panel thought demand for parking could *double* in five years if development goals are reached. Even if public transit is improved and expanded, the majority of downtown trips will still be made in private autos.

The panelists were generally surprised and impressed with downtown Spokane's architecture. There are several pre-WW II buildings that have been tastefully and sensitively restored and re-used. Others show evidence of reinvestment, but in some cases the work mars the design rather than enhancing it. The dated skywalk connecting to the Bennett Building is out of place, for example, and detracts from an otherwise handsome building. Downtown leaders should utilize and be sensitive to this historic character in planning any downtown parking facilities.

Panelists also found evidence that nightlife is returning to downtown. Restaurants seemed busy in the evenings. Theaters and other activities provide reasons for people to choose to spend time and money downtown, and the streets feel safe at night. Evening parking demand will need to be regularly assessed, accommodated, and managed.

Panelists observed what seems to be a lack of downtown housing. This impression was confirmed by a number of downtown leaders, although they pointed out that there are a number of attractive neighborhoods on the periphery of downtown. Residential parking should be part of the downtown parking plan. Moderately priced overnight parking can help to improve overall parking revenues and support the construction of needed parking garages.

Panelists admired the beauty of the river gorge and park space, and the opportunities it offers for downtown workers and visitors to enjoy parks and trails in good weather. These natural assets also have to be taken into account in terms of the parking demand they will generate as Spokane's employee and visitor numbers increase.

Overall, the experience of visiting downtown can be a positive and memorable one. But it is important to keep in mind that most people first experience downtown as they try to park; and the last experience they have as they leave downtown is leaving a parking facility or on-street space. If these parking experiences are negative, they will greatly detract from what otherwise might have been a host of positive experiences.

IDA PANEL SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel recommends that the Downtown Spokane Partnership, the BID, and the City of Spokane undertake a two-track strategy to improve dramatically the parking experience in downtown Spokane. The first track includes things that can be done in the absence of a coordinated downtown parking system. The second track involves the creation, over the next several months, of an entity that can manage and/or influence the entire downtown parking system – both public and private.

Track I -- Immediate Action Items

- Introduce new, less police-like uniforms for the meter patrol
- Increase the number of businesses participating in the EasyPark validation program.
- Provide escort and package carrying service, using golf carts.
- Investigate the potential for “the first hour free” or other rate modifications at RPS.
- On random days, instead of parking tickets, give parking customers coupons on their windshields, to be used at downtown merchant locations.
- Continue to aggressively encourage employees to park in City Ticket lots and away from on-street, short-term meters.
- Establish another City Ticket parking facility under the freeway and coordinate STA shuttle service.
- Expand on-street parking spaces through a diagonal parking program.

- Immediately adjust the rates of the meter bag program for nonprofits, media and contractors.
- Investigate use of validation for one-hour free parking with the BID, garages and businesses.
- Integrate the Riverpoint campus parking into the Downtown parking system.
- Conduct focus groups to better understand downtown parking customers.
- Move the parking violations department back to City Hall or establish parking violation pay station/drop boxes in downtown with a reduction in ticket cost for early payment.

Track II – Creating a Downtown Parking System

Panelists believe that Spokane has a fragmented parking system with components that seem to be separately managed within City Hall. Others involved in various ways in downtown parking, such as private companies and the BID (validation program) only occasionally communicate and cooperate in ways that benefit the customer. In addition, it appears that Downtown parking has evolved into a system that is revenue and violator driven. The current way parking is delivered Downtown does not support current public and private development goals for Downtown Spokane.

The IDA Advisory Panel recommends that Spokane create a downtown parking system built around the following “Guiding Principles”:

- The downtown parking system should be customer-oriented, not violator- or revenue-oriented. If customers see the system as fair and friendly, the panel believes that increased revenues will result.
- The downtown parking system should seek to provide customers with “an experience worth having.” All aspects of downtown parking should reflect an understanding of what the downtown customer desires in terms of a positive and memorable downtown experience.
- The downtown parking system should be managed by a single entity capable of addressing both operations and capital improvements.
- The downtown parking system should be seen as an essential and integral part of the community’s economic development strategies and programs.

The IDA Advisory Panel recommends the following goals for downtown Spokane leaders to adopt:

- Achieve a unified, centralized management structure that anticipates demand and responds appropriately

Results

- Promotes and supports economic development

- Creates policies that encourage private investment
 - Coordinates and plans with other developers
 - Responds effectively to downtown stakeholders
 - Provides increased tax revenues that support neighborhood development
 - Enhances downtown promotion and communication
 - Maximizes the efficient use of current parking resources
 - Provides an important partner for the MPO on environmental needs
 - Provides a consistently high level of customer service
 - Influences the quality of customer service at private parking facilities
 - Develops measures of success and routinely surveys customer satisfaction
- Create a downtown parking system that makes parking an incentive rather than a disincentive to downtown revitalization and improvement.

Results

- Reviews and adjusts prices based on user behavior
 - Maintains clean, attractive facilities staffed by friendly personnel
 - Assures accessible and convenient parking
 - Creates an image and identity for the parking system that is positive and easily recognizable
 - Provides a parking experience that is consistently positive
- Organize and manage the downtown parking system so that it is self-supporting.

Results

- Encourages efficient and effective administration
- Reinvests surplus revenues in system improvements
- Increases flexibility to address evolving nature of downtown
- Promotes planned rather than reactive management
- Generates revenues for finance future capital investments

Four parking management models were considered.

- *Municipal* -- Incremental improvements within the City of Spokane
- *Authority* -- Creation of a new, independent “parking authority.”
- *Contract* -- Assumption of management responsibilities by the DSP, Chamber, or BID
- *Privatized* -- Contracting all parking management to a private company.

In addition, the panel considered three levels of change – minimum, moderate, and maximum. By analyzing these options in the context of all the background information

and input provided by downtown and city leaders during the panel process, the panel reached the following recommendation:

IDA ADVISORY PANEL PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION

- ***Create a new private, nonprofit organization, similar to the PPDA (but not the PPDA). The new organization should be governed by a board of 9-13 members representing downtown business interests and the City of Spokane. The new organization should assume responsibility for the entire downtown public parking system – meters, enforcement, surface lots and garages; and should coordinate its activities with private providers to ensure the best possible experience for downtown parking customers. The new organization should have a name that clearly distinguishes it from the PPDA and other existing parking organizations.***
- ***Hire an experienced, motivated, and energetic parking manager who both possesses extensive parking management knowledge and skills, and understands downtown’s history and development goals. The downtown parking system should contract day-to-day operations to a capable, experienced, customer-oriented parking management company. Finally, we recommend that Spokane set its sights high – in other words, seek to create an award-winning “best-in-class” parking system.***
- ***Launch this effort with a small group of private and public stakeholders convened as soon as possible; and develop a proposal for a new corporation in the next 60-90 days. The boards of DSP, the BID and the City Council should approve resolutions supporting the creation of the new corporation.***
- ***Commit some of the funds set aside for a parking study to the legal and administrative costs of creating this corporation.***
- ***Consider undertaking the following activities with the remaining funds: (1) A physical inventory and use study; and (2) A projection of future parking demand and supply.***
- ***Remaining funds should be held until the new corporation is organized, and these funds should be targeted toward the goals and objectives approved by the current parking committee and toward specific questions that the new board and executive director determine are most urgent and most strategic.***

This recommendation supports the City of Spokane-adopted Plan for a New Downtown. The Downtown parking goal stated in the Plan is to “complete a strategic parking management plan by identifying users needs, involving stakeholders, increasing the supply of short-term on-street parking, improving peripheral employee parking and creating a travel demand management program with incentives for users.”

The Plan also recommends that public and private downtown leaders identify sites for new structured parking, add diagonal parking, complete design guidelines for parking structures (completed) and amend the PPDA charter to act as a parking authority to support economic development Downtown.

IDA ADVISORY PANEL SUPPORTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel makes the following recommendations, some of which can be undertaken immediately and others that should be undertaken if a new parking management entity is created:

Immediate actions:

- Many downtown employees are currently parking in prime, close-in spots that should be targeted for short-term customers and visitors. The panel observed that downtown street meters are usually full long before stores open. Some of these cars are parked all day in prime metered spots. City staff estimate that as much as ten percent of downtown metered spaces are occupied by downtown employees. Employees should be strongly encouraged to park in peripheral lots, providing close-in, convenient parking for visitors and customers, unless their jobs require regular access to their cars during the business day.
- The City and DSP should investigate other sources of funds for capital improvement in addition to parking revenues. TIF and special assessment districts might be worthwhile options. Many cities use TIF in conjunction with major downtown developments as a way of providing structured parking. Providing a single point of contact for private developers to build additional parking facilities and/or to partner with private developers can be a major element in an effective economic development program.
- Downtown companies might consider providing employees with financial incentives to reduce commuter trips to and from downtown. Encouraging employees to take public transit would also reduce the occurrence of employee use of close-in parking metered spaces.

Mid- to long-term actions (based on creation of a new management entity)

- Monthly parking rates in the core are reported to be as much as \$90 per month with long waiting lists. If this is true, demand may support a significant part of the cost of building new facilities in downtown. The panel estimated that it might cost \$120 per month per space to build and operate a new parking facility in downtown Spokane.
- Creating a single, unified system of management would allow the creation of consistent signing and branding throughout the system. At present, it is difficult

for an occasional visitor to downtown to determine which parking facilities are public, private, or reserved for employees.

- A “parking authority” should aggressively market parking validation programs to Downtown stakeholders. The validation program should be targeted toward retail and restaurants, but also toward professional firms, such as attorneys, architects and accountants. One of the benefits of an “authority” is the ability to reduce or eliminate the cost of parking for specific downtown customers. An authority or management corporation is more likely to be able to organize free parking for specific customers who come downtown.

SUMMARY

Downtown Spokane and the Spokane community have wrestled over the past several months with two extremely difficult and painful parking issues: what to do about River Park Square and what to do about downtown parking in general. The IDA Advisory Panel believes that, in the end, the River Park Square controversy will be resolved, either through negotiation or litigation. However it is resolved, downtown parking will remain a problem unless a new approach is taken. Only then will the parking system generate enough revenue to provide Spokane with first-class downtown parking, and at the same time produce enough revenue to meet future demand.