

Section I: Common Themes, Challenges and Opportunities

The parking capacity and utilization work that supports this study presents a comprehensive quantitative picture of how parking currently functions in Downtown Spokane (see **Appendices A – C**). Data from that analysis has been thoroughly reviewed by Parking Steering Committee (PSC) to garner a more complete understanding of the actual dynamics of parking activity in the downtown as well as an assessment of the true availability of parking. Equally important for development of a parking management plan is an understanding of the vision for the future of the downtown from the perspective of the stakeholders.



A. BACKGROUND

A key element of the work scope for this study was to identify and develop “consensus priorities for parking” and to incorporate those priorities into Guiding Principles for parking management. In this regard, the PSC met in several work sessions to discuss and identify common themes and develop consensus on the following issues:

- Development and access challenges for businesses and residents.
- Current opportunities that would facilitate doing business in the downtown.
- Identification of priority users of the downtown (current and future).
- Establish consensus priorities for access and use for a range of parking uses that included:
 - a. On-street parking
 - b. Off-street parking (privately controlled)
 - c. Off-street parking (publicly controlled)
 - d. Priority/role of alternative access modes
- Develop guiding principles for parking management that will define the primary purpose of parking and transportation facilities within the downtown study area.

The PSC’s work in addressing the above stated issues provided a foundation for understanding downtown not only from the perspective of parking, but of long-term visioning for economic development. This effort resulted in establishment of a consensus set of Guiding Principles to guide parking management decisions in a strategic manner. These Guiding Principles are presented in **Section II**.

B. STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The work scope called for strong stakeholder input into the development of a parking plan for the downtown. The participation of downtown stakeholders in this process has been strong and represents a critical component of this work. Stakeholders will continue to represent an essential resource for the City as the parking management plan and strategies recommended in this study are implemented over time. As such, understanding stakeholder concerns and ideas

for downtown is critically important because they are the users of the downtown system on a daily basis. In addition, their investment and ownership in downtown will be supported as the recommendations of the parking study and management strategy are put in place. Any parking or access changes made to the downtown will have a direct impact on those who own, work, shop, or visit Downtown Spokane. The consultant team believes the plan has endeavored to be sensitive to, and cognizant of, this relationship.

C. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

To develop a parking and access plan for downtown, it is first necessary to understand the dynamics of land use, access and growth that are unique to Spokane. Community perceptions and realities regarding constraints that limit existing businesses from expanding and those that limits Spokane's ability to attract new business growth to the downtown need to be fully considered. Similarly, opportunities and successful programs/strategies that currently contribute to downtown's health need to be understood in order to ensure they are supported and enhanced by any new parking and access strategies developed.

To this end, the consultant team conducted an initial work session with the PSC to begin to establish a consensus view of these challenges and opportunities. It was also important for the consultant team to establish a common perception or view of Downtown Spokane – today and into the future – with key stakeholders.

1. Desired Outcomes

PSC members were asked to take a moment and state what they would like to see as an outcome of this process. For example, if a new parking management program were developed, what beneficial outcomes would be derived? A bulleted list of those desired outcomes are provided below.

- Clearer policy direction
- More consistency in managing parking by zones
- Integrated decisions that balance need with effect on the entire parking system (i.e., consider how initiating one thing in a parking zone may have a negative impact on another)
- Managing parking to have "pedestrian friendly" benefits
- Having a better understanding (through analysis) of the physical profile of parking
- Understanding strategic/deliberate elements of managing parking
- A more "customer friendly" parking system in downtown
- A transition of surface parking lots to structures (strategically located)
- Preserve historic character of buildings in downtown (i.e., new parking supply should not come at the expense of historic buildings)
- A 'tool box' to influence future parking policy for office/retail/residential development
- Easy to use finished product - a "usable" parking program

It was clear from the listing of desired outcomes that PSC members feel the current system of parking management lacks integration and consistency with the larger vision for downtown. Similarly, the theme of the need to better "understand" parking runs through many of the stated outcomes. In short, to get to the desired outcome of a usable and friendly parking system, requires more clarity and coherency in how parking is, and will be, managed.

2. Challenges to Access - Consensus Themes

PSC members discussed their insights into the major parking challenges facing downtown today and in the coming years. They were asked to consider these challenges as they influence downtown's ability to remain vital, attract and retain business and achieve the vision set out in the *Plan for a New Downtown*. Overall, nineteen items were developed. Challenges ranged from general perceptions of parking to actual physical infrastructure. The consultant team condensed the discussion into six themes. Themes regarding challenges to access are presented below, with clarifying bullet points taken from the PSC discussion following each theme.¹

- ✓ *There is not a clear consensus on parking policy or the roles of the public and private sector in the provision/management of parking to meet future goals and objectives.* The issue of how parking is provided in downtown to meet economic goals and objectives is critical to the success of a parking management plan. The specific role the public and private sectors play in the provision of parking for the "public" must be understood and mutually agreed upon.
 - Aligning partnerships as it relates to parking and access (i.e., goals and policies need to be mutually developed and adopted).
 - Need to attract a more diverse mix of businesses downtown.

- ✓ *The parking supply is not managed to its maximum potential.* There was a feeling by some on the PSC that the current parking supply is not managed to achieve optimum utilization. This is an existing problem that could have impacts on the efficiency and cost of development of future supply.
 - There is not a coordinated system of parking management for the downtown.
 - Need for better connectivity in the downtown between destinations.
 - The availability of accessible and proximate parking for customers and patrons.
 - Conflicts in the parking supply between customer and employee demand.
 - A better understanding of the appropriateness of the current parking format downtown (i.e., meter times, loading zones, management zones, etc.).

- ✓ *Parking abuse.* PSC members believe there is a high level of employee abuse of the on-street parking system. The PSC noted that large numbers of employees are not parking in areas designated for employee parking, violating time stays and "moving to evade."² Similarly, stakeholders noted abuse of handicap spaces and loading zones. Overall, this type of activity hinders maximum efficiency and reduces/constrains the availability of on-street parking for customer and visitor parking access in the downtown.
 - Employees parking in downtown (on-street).

¹ The themes are not listed in any rank order. The PSC felt each theme had an important impact on the downtown's ability to achieve its strategic vision and should be considered equally in the context of multiple challenges.

² "Moving to evade" involves employees who move their vehicles from one on-street parking stall to another within the downtown, throughout the day, rather than parking in a designated employee area for their entire work day. It is assumed that this practice is engaged in by employees as an attempt to avoid a higher cost for off-street parking.

- Handicapped parking abuse issue.
 - Abuse of loading zones (i.e., bagging).
- ✓ Negative perception of access/capacity. Several PSC members noted the public has a strong perception that Downtown Spokane has an insufficient number of parking stalls and that the parking system is difficult to use and understand. These perceptions, whether true or not, have an adverse impact on downtown business viability. Compounding this is the sense that directional and information systems for patrons are inadequate. In addition, the need for aggressive and sustained marketing and communications will be important.
- Perception that Downtown Spokane lacks capacity and is difficult to access.
 - Cost (affordability) of parking for both office and retail users.
 - Low-tech system (i.e., meters, pay systems, communication, etc.) may create confusion/inefficiencies.
 - Downtown must compete with other shopping areas.
 - Parking downtown is hard to understand (i.e., rates, signage, directional systems, etc.).
- ✓ Maintaining transit service (and other modes) as a means to reduce constraints on the downtown parking supply. The PSC noted that transit service could play an important role in addressing congestion issues and influencing the overall amount of parking that may need to be built in the future. However, recent funding cuts to the STA, and ensuing cuts in service, could lead to an increase in employee use of the existing parking supply. The PSC noted the critical need to build support for transit and transit funding as a component of a comprehensive parking plan.
- Threat to, and potential loss of, STA funding and services resulting in less transit for use by employees. This can create additional demands on the parking and traffic systems.
 - Building support for transit and the STA as a parking objective.
- ✓ Cost of building structured parking. Several on the PSC expressed concern regarding the community's ability to provide for increases in the parking supply necessary to meet growing demand. The cost to develop parking, particularly in structures, is very high and the current system does not support growth in the supply of parking. There is also a desire to see some surface parking lots develop into structures rather than see historic buildings razed to create surface parking. Net increases in parking should not come at the expense of the historical integrity of the downtown.
- Resistance to public sector investment in public parking.³
 - Lack of a capital strategy for funding/supporting public parking program(s)/infrastructure.

3. Opportunities – Consensus Themes

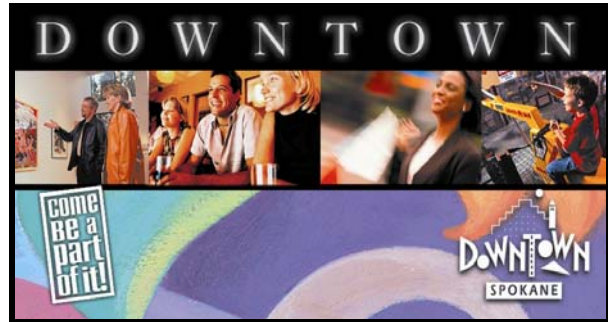
PSC members discussed programs, strategies or elements that are currently in place and “working for downtown” by contributing to its success and supporting business and economic growth. Overall, PSC members mentioned twelve items. Opportunities ranged from Spokane’s unique business environment to its strong sense of community. Three opportunity themes were clearly distinguished. They are briefly detailed here:

³ At the time of this writing, the issue of litigation over the River Park Square Garage was likely fueling this resistance.



✓ Success of, and potential for, existing rewards and incentive programs. Several programs are in place that communicates a customer-friendly approach to downtown. Those programs should stay in place and be augmented over time to increase public awareness and understanding of them. They include *City Ticket*, *Bounce-Back* and *Easy Park*. Additional efforts in marketing, communications and outreach need to be developed in response to the challenge of “perception” described above.

- *City Ticket* program is a good program.
- Incentive rewards programs, which include *Bounce Back* and *Easy Park* are good.
- Use of the peripheral lots (550 vehicles using these lots), which takes employee demand out of the core.



✓ Demonstrable commitment to downtown by the City, business community and citizenry.

PSC members underscored the active role the business community and citizens have played in Spokane’s success and the partnership approach of City leadership. Stakeholders noted that there is a strong “sense of community” in Spokane, which underlies Spokane’s unique character and success.

- Stakeholder partnership(s). A good feeling about downtown's future.
- Sense of place/home/community/friendly people.
- A visionary picture of the future - *The Plan for a New Downtown*.

✓ A strong positive sense about downtown's future. The PSC was unanimous in its sense that the future of Downtown Spokane is that of success, growth and vitality. The work that has been put in place to establish a foundation for growth (i.e., *Plan for a New Downtown*) has high level of support and feasibility.

- A viable downtown.
- A sense that people want to come downtown.
- Downtown is a unique destination and shopping experience.
- Improving nightlife in downtown.
- Increased interest in housing development downtown.
- Lots of opportunity for continued growth.

Overall, programs and strategies that continue to support and enhance the opportunity themes developed by the PSC can serve as a framework through which the consensus challenges are best addressed. All parking strategies developed by the PSC and presented in **Section IV** of this report are intended to mitigate challenges and support opportunities.

D. ACCESS PRIORITIES

1. Key Elements of a Successful Parking Program

PSC members were asked to list elements they would use to describe a "successful" parking program that, if in place in Spokane, would facilitate solving the transportation challenges and support/enhance the priority opportunities described above. Stakeholder input is outlined below.

A successful parking program for Spokane would be...

- Simple and intuitive – easy to use
- Well-signed and understood
- Pay for itself – be cash positive
- Safe and secure
- Well-lit
- Effective/appropriate enforcement
- Parking integrated into the existing traffic system
- "System" is coordinated (all parking areas/zones work together)
- Uniform parking management plan (public/private) with consensus on priorities
- Connects the core to other growing areas of the downtown
- Cost effective (affordable)
- Customer friendly
- Convenient and available
- Proximate and efficient
- Supportive of downtown's goals and vision
- Parking as a package of services (i.e., customer and employee). Serves all users.
- Parking assets are linked (i.e., to pedestrian system, to each other, to destinations)
- Parking management is well coordinated with other access modes (i.e., transit, bike, walk, etc.)
- Pricing is innovative to support/attract priority uses



It is clear the PSC would envision a parking program that is innovative and flexible to meet the changing demands of an evolving downtown. They would also stress the need for an affordable, safe and secure parking system. The parking program should contribute to the overall viability of the downtown and its goals and vision. At root, a successful parking system is convenient and user friendly. The charge of the consultant team and the PSC was to develop a parking strategy that achieves and supports these elements to the highest degree possible. The plan and strategy are presented in Sections III and IV of this report.

2. Definition of "Priority Customer"

The Downtown Spokane parking system currently services a broad mix of users that include commercial employees, retail patrons, event goers and visitors to the downtown. In the future, increasing numbers of downtown residents and service industry employees will add to the

existing demand on the parking supply. As such, it is important to recognize that a balanced *system* of access needs to be developed and managed to assure the overall vision of a vital, active and mixed-use downtown is achieved.

Nonetheless, (for purposes of the management of on-street parking) the consensus of the PSC was the priority customers of Downtown Spokane are its patrons; those who come repeatedly to shop, dine, recreate and be entertained. The general profile of the patron is short-term stays that result in a high turnover of parking in the downtown. As patron demand increases, parking opportunities both on and off-street will be required to assure continued access. Efforts and resources in the area of parking management should be directed toward patron demand. The private sector can be an ally in facilitating access for employees and residents as well as support for, and participation in, alternative transportation mode programs and strategies.

The fact that the PSC has prioritized the downtown patron as the focal point of parking management is not to downplay the importance of other users of the downtown. The PSC has defined a benchmark against which management and decision-making for publicly controlled supply is measured. The PSC recognizes that constraints and conflict for demand within the supply will occur and that decisions and strategies will have to be implemented that guarantee access to the priority patron.⁴

3. “Is” Versus “Should”

In a final work session, the PSC discussed its access priorities for downtown. Stakeholders were asked to consider a number of questions regarding the realities of access and use within the current transportation system (i.e., the *is* of today). They were then asked to consider how the transportation system *should* be accessed and used in the future within the context of the challenges/opportunities discussed above, and incorporate their goals and objectives for developing an “ideal” Downtown Spokane – as envisioned in the *Plan for a New Downtown*.

A. Priority Land Uses

When asked, “*what is the priority land use(s) in downtown today?*” the committee responded:

- Commercial office in the core zone
- Mixed uses and open space surrounding the core

In the future, the committee agreed the priority for land uses *should* be “a more highly developed mixed-use core” that maintains commercial office but grows retail, entertainment and residential.

B. Priority Modes of Access

When asked to define the priority mode of access to downtown by both customers and employees, the PSC responded as follows:

⁴ The term “publicly controlled supply” will need further discussion by the PSC as this plan evolves. The fact that little off-street supply is currently in public control presents unique challenges for creating a “system” of patron supply. Innovative partnerships and programs will need to be developed, requiring high consensus on priorities and a clear understanding of current parking deficits and surpluses.

Customer trips

Today, a customer's priority mode of access to downtown is by the single-occupant vehicle.

In the future, a customer's primary mode of access should be through a greater mix of access options (i.e., transit, bike, walk), recognizing the single-occupant vehicle will still represent the greatest percentage of customer trips.

Employee trips

Today, an employee's priority mode of access to downtown is by the single-occupant vehicle.

In the future, an employee's primary mode of access should be through a greater mix of access options (i.e., transit, bike, walk), **recognizing that each employee auto trip to the downtown removes a parking space that could be used by patrons of the downtown.**

Transit in particular should bring an increased percentage of total employee trips to the downtown.

C. Priority Use of Parking

On-street



When asked, “who is the on-street parking system currently prioritized for?” the PSC felt that existing on-street parking strongly favors the customer/patron in the core and longer-term users on the periphery. There was a strong sense that employees currently abuse on-street parking in the core area.

In the future, the committee felt that downtown on-street parking should continue to be prioritized for patrons in all areas where short-term demand is most prevalent. Strong efforts should be made to assure that only patrons are using the on-street system (i.e., enforcement) and that the outer areas and strategically located off-street facilities should serve a mix of patrons and employees. Employee abuse should be mitigated.

Off-street

As to the question of parking in privately controlled off-street parking facilities, the PSC noted the current priority for lots in downtown is a mix of users that includes employees and patrons. In the future, the PSC believes that off-street parking in the downtown should be prioritized for patrons requiring a time stay greater than provided on-street.

Recognizing the City has limited abilities to influence how private facilities are operated, the PSC believes that privately owned off-street facilities should gradually prioritize more parking for an increasing number of long-term parkers, particularly in lots and garages outside the core zone.

D. *Priorities for Alternative Modes of Access*

The PSC considered the role of alternative modes for users of the downtown (patrons and employees). When asked what the on-going role of transit/bike/rideshare and walking was for customers and employees, the PSC stated the following:

- Transit, bicycling, ridesharing should become an "option that patrons can choose" as a means of accessing downtown.
- Transit, bicycling and ridesharing should become a "realistic and cost-effective *option that a greater percentage of employees will* choose" as a means of accessing downtown.
- Alternative modes for employees should be strongly encouraged, as success in alternative modes will lead to better efficiencies for the supply of patron parking.



E. **SUMMARY**

It was clear from the work of the PSC there is a strong consensus on the challenges and opportunities that exist in Downtown Spokane. There is also a clear sense Spokane is moving forward in attracting economic activity and amenities that support the "ideal" downtown called for in *The Plan for a New Downtown*. Most importantly, the PSC was strong in its understanding of access priorities and unified in support of developing programs and strategies necessary to make certain those access priorities are met and desired economic uses are supported. In the area of parking, it is clear the priority of stakeholders is to assure continued and growing accessibility for the patron of downtown.