

CITY OF LAFAYETTE

Parking

A Management Strategy for Lafayette

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Parking policy is directly connected to the livability of a community. This document aims to present a full picture of the parking situation in Lafayette including a baseline of the type and number of spaces, the challenges faced, a vision for the future and a strategy to achieve that vision.

Introduction

In mid-2013, the City Council established the Parking Ordinance Committee ("Committee") to update the City's parking code as required by the Downtown Specific Plan. After several workshops and public meetings, the Committee determined that the City would need more than a code update to resolve the parking challenges facing the downtown. What downtown Lafayette needed was a multi-faceted parking management strategy that addressed parking in a holistic manner and not on a parcel by parcel basis, as is the current practice. What was also lacking was information; i.e., actual data on the number of public and private parking spaces in the downtown as well as an accurate assessment of the demand for these spaces.

The Committee spent the last three years meeting with affected businesses and residents and developing the parking management strategy ("Strategy") that is included in this report. In this Strategy, the Committee has tried to create a fair, results-driven and sustainable system that offers solutions to manage and optimize the use of both private and public parking. Key principles that drive the Strategy are a desire to protect the small town character of the downtown, maintain the City's existing building stock, address issues of proprietary parking and the underutilization of existing parking, provide a predictable and fair process to seek variances, and finally, find a long-term parking solution for employees and BART patrons.

The Committee also commissioned the preparation of a comprehensive downtown parking inventory and occupancy survey which was completed in early 2017. The survey will serve as the baseline upon which future parking decisions can be made. That survey is appended to the Strategy.

The Committee recognizes that there is no single magic bullet that will solve the City's parking challenges. Rather, it will take a series of small actions to effectively and efficiently manage parking in the downtown. The cooperation of downtown property owners, businesses, residents and the Chamber of Commerce is critical in ensuring this Strategy's success.

Background

Existing Regulations

The City's parking regulations have been in place since 1977. Periodically, revisions were made to various sections of the code, the most recent being in 2005. The regulations have not been comprehensively reviewed or updated since adoption.

Downtown Specific Plan

In 2012, the City adopted its first Downtown Specific Plan ("DSP"). The Planning Commission and City Council held over 135 public meetings during the DSP's six-year review and parking in the downtown was a frequent topic of discussion. The Downtown Core parking analysis conducted for the DSP contained the following conclusions:



1. There is adequate parking in the Downtown Core as a whole to meet City parking standards. The problem is not how much parking the Downtown Core contains; it's where the parking is located, how accessible it is and how it is regulated or restricted.
2. There is a shortage of off-street public parking, as compared to other cities.
3. Employees of businesses in downtown Lafayette do not have the benefit of dedicated, off-site, long term parking nor are they routinely offered incentives to use alternative modes of transport.
4. On-street metered parking spaces on Mt. Diablo Blvd. are underutilized in many locations.

The adopted DSP includes the following policy and implementation program:

Policy 11.5. Update parking regulations.

Program 11.5.1. Review the City's parking regulations for updating to current standards, including parking requirements for different uses and the parking in-lieu fee.

Work Completed by the Committee

Initial Assessments

The Parking Committee consists of a representative each from the Planning Commission, the Circulation Commissions and the Chamber of Commerce. To familiarize itself with the issues, the Committee first reviewed previous parking studies including the Parking Analysis for the Downtown Core completed in 2010 and the employee parking survey of 2007. Committee members also discussed the role that parking plays in the downtown. Following are the Committee's initial thoughts which later crystallized into the parking management strategy for the downtown.

- 1. Parking impacts downtown character**
One of the goals should be to preserve the existing building and fabric of the town. Parking means much more than providing a space for cars. It relates to uses, form and character.
- 2. The City needs a system that is fair and predictable**
Find a system that can be easily implemented and that is fair and predictable when handling variances or exceptions. Properties with no parking should also contribute to solving the problem. Those land owners have benefitted from not paying for parking for a long time.
- 3. New development must meet its parking obligations**

The existing parking ordinance was analyzed as well as the regulations from several comparable jurisdictions. The Committee came to the following conclusions about the current ordinance:

- 1. It perpetuates parking shortages by allowing a grace period of 120 days.**
The parking regulations perpetuate parking shortages by allowing a grace period of 120 days during which a new business can occupy an under parked tenant space without providing the required parking. As a result, there are several properties which are severely under parked and continue to have no parking or fewer parking spaces than what is required by code. The Committee agreed that owners of these non-conforming properties should contribute to solving the parking problem since they have benefitted for many years from not paying for parking and have enjoyed parking provided by other property owners and the City.

2. **The parking in-lieu fees are extremely high and serve as a disincentive to development.**
The current in lieu fees are \$36,900 for a space in the Downtown Core and \$19,200 for a space outside the Core. These amounts reflect the cost of land and improvements. In the Core, the fee reflects the cost of a space in a two-level parking garage, and outside the Core, it reflects the cost of a space in a surface parking lot. No one has paid this in lieu fee since the fee was increased in 2005. The Committee agreed that the high parking in lieu fee may be a disincentive to development and the City may not be able to collect sufficient funds to acquire public parking lots. The Committee also discussed the possibility of creating a tiered system of payment and/or payment over time.
3. **The discretionary process to review parking shortages is unpredictable and long.**
Requests for variances to the parking regulations require the approval of the Planning Commission, a process that can take several months. Businesses interested in locating in the downtown often do not have time to wait that long for a decision from the City.
4. **The current parking ratios (number of spaces required for each land use) are generally consistent with the ratios imposed by other cities.**
Lafayette's parking ratios are neither too high nor too low when compared to other cities. However, cities that have recently updated their regulations have adopted new incentives such as waivers for small tenant spaces and reductions in parking requirements when proximate to transit. Lafayette's code does not include these incentives and waivers.
5. **Current regulations stipulate ratios based on "net floor area" which is difficult to calculate and which can be easily manipulated.**
Lafayette bases its requirements on "net floor area". Requirements based on "gross floor area" are easier to understand and implement. It is also consistent with other cities' practices. Additionally, older codes like Lafayette's list parking requirements as "one space per "x" square feet" (example: retail uses require 1 space per 250 SF). Newer codes use "'x" spaces per 1,000 square feet" (example: retail uses require 4 spaces per 1,000 SF). The latter is easier to understand and calculate.
6. **The parking regulations contain ratios for far too many land uses.**
There are thirty six different types of land uses listed in the parking regulations. The list should be simplified by combining like uses.
7. **The regulations impose different parking ratios on similar uses.**
As an example, bakeries are required to park at 4 spaces per 1,000 SF whereas a delicatessen's requirement is 10 spaces per 1,000 SF. This should be corrected.
8. **The regulations are inflexible in dealing with tenant spaces that have more than one use.**
Modern retailers often include an amenity within a tenant space such as a station for haircuts within a women's clothing store. This is done to attract a wider range of clientele. The current regulations would require parking for both the uses rather than waive the requirement for the ancillary use, i.e., the station for haircuts.

- 9. The regulations do not provide standards for bicycle parking, tandem parking, car lifts, etc.**
Cities that have recently updated their regulations have adopted requirements such as allowances for bicycle parking, tandem parking, car-sharing, car lifts, etc.

Public Outreach

Committee members expressed a strong interest in reaching out to the community to share their initial thoughts about the Strategy and solicit feedback. The Committee made its first presentation to the Business Affairs group of the Chamber of Commerce in July, 2014 and comments were solicited at the 2014 Art and Wine Festival.

In the fall and winter of 2014, the Committee hosted three public workshops, one for each area of the downtown, East End, Downtown Core and West End. The workshops were attended by business owners, residents, property owners and other interested parties. The Committee explained its preliminary findings, presented the basic tenets of a Parking Management Strategy and invited the attendees to come up with short and long term solutions for parking in the downtown. The feedback received helped the Committee further refine the Strategy.

In 2015/16, owners of the La Fiesta Square and Fiesta Lane retail centers installed parking meters in their lots to improve turnover and discourage long term parking. The Committee met with owners and representatives of these centers to understand the impacts of metering private lots.

Parking Solutions for Immediate Implementation

In May 2016, the Committee submitted to the City Council a list of action items that could be immediately implemented to improve the use and efficiency of public parking and encourage turnover. Included in the list were the following:

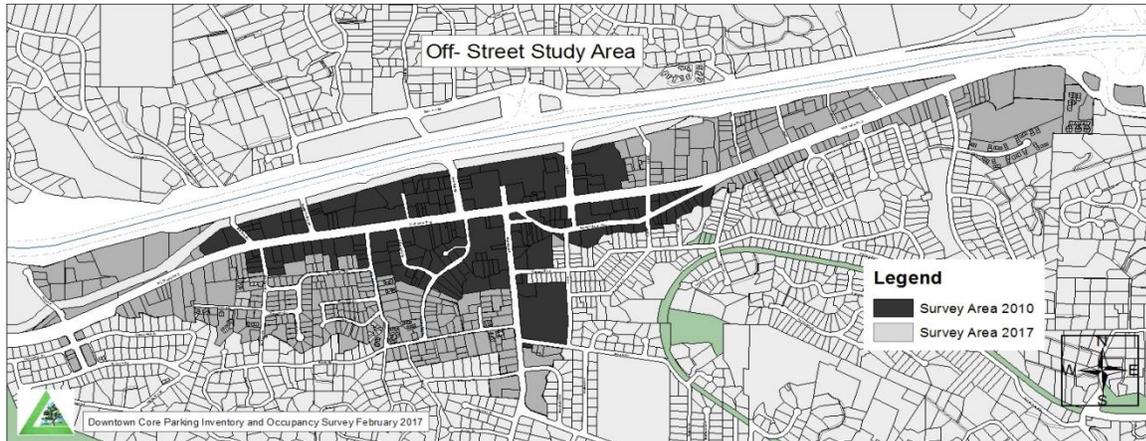
1. Installing parking meters on Lafayette Circle adjacent to La Fiesta Square and Fiesta Lane, two private retail centers with metered lots.
2. Increasing the long-term, daily parking fee on First Street from \$1 to \$5 to make pricing consistent with other on-street long term metered spaces near BART.
3. Installing meters on Dolores Drive to increase supply of long term parking.
4. Reserving the 40 on-street spaces on Happy Valley Road for Lafayette residents for a test period of six months.
5. Reducing the daily fee at the City's 949 Moraga Road lot from \$5 to \$2 to increase usage.
6. Establishing a \$1 minimum payment for all credit card meters, because service charges constitute 40c of every \$1 collected from credit card meters.

All these recommendations have been successfully implemented. An assessment of the temporary Happy Valley Road resident-only permit program has been provided by Eric Christiansen, Lafayette Chief of Police. A recommendation to make the program permanent will be considered by the City Council.

Creating the Database

In the spring of 2015, staff conducted weekday and weekend occupancy surveys of the public and private parking lots located in and around the Shield Block. This area contains Lafayette Mercantile, La Fiesta and Fiesta Lane and has become the epicenter of retail and restaurant activity in the downtown.

In early 2017, a comprehensive parking inventory and occupancy survey was completed for all on- and off-street parking in the entire downtown; i.e., from Risa Road in the west to Pleasant Hill Road in the east. A more detailed explanation of the inventory and survey are provided in this report.



Utilizing the information gathered from the surveys and assessments, the workshops and meetings, the Committee drafted a series of recommendations (Strategy) to optimize the use and management of parking in the downtown.

Challenges

History: Small Town Downtown

Many of the parcels in downtown Lafayette were developed before there were cars so there is little space for them now and excessively convenient parking has become a limited resource. It is also important to note that while finding parking may be frustrating, it is a great problem for a town to have. Parking challenges mean a healthy economy with many popular and thriving businesses. A major source of the City's character is the existing building stock. Allowing for flexibility in the parking in-lieu payment will help to maintain the current buildings rather than vacant storefronts or demolition in favor of building more spaces on individual parcels.

Perception: Free and In-Front

One common conception about parking is that it is free and a right. The mindset of "I should be able to park right in front of my destination" contributes to the perceived lack of parking. A parking study commissioned by the City of Lafayette in 1978 states that the average shopper is willing to walk 156 feet from their car to the store in question, and at most 370 feet¹. While the modern shopper may be more willing to venture from their car, one goal of this study is to figure out how to incentivize drivers to park further from their destination to better utilize the parking stock and de-congest the Downtown Core. Parking meters are one of the only ways to ensure turnover in busy areas. Parking turnover is good for businesses in that it allows more shoppers throughout the day and consumers as it ensures some availability of parking.

Similarly, there is a common misperception that the City makes money on parking meters. Many people don't favor the parking meters, but once they understand the purpose and effectiveness of the meters they are less likely to be upset by them. It is important to recognize, while free parking has become an expectation, it actually costs a significant amount of money to create and maintain, especially parking

¹ Billington, S. D. (October 1978). *Off-Street Parking: Three Commercial Centers*. Page 5.

garages. As Donald Shoup states, “parking requirements reduce the cost of owning a car but raise the cost of everything else.”²

The City does not receive any money from the parking meters on the private lots because they are privately owned and privately enforced. The City gets some money from the meters on the street, but much of it goes towards the maintenance of the meters, allowing credit cards to be accepted and the cost of the parking enforcement officers. The goal with parking meters is to generate turnover, so that there are some free spaces at any given time when someone wants to park. Making money is not a primary goal of parking meters.

Parking meters create a functional market for convenient parking which is well documented by the successful parking programs implemented by cities such as Walnut Creek, Redwood City and Oakland. Drivers can choose to pay for convenient parking near their destination, they can look for cheaper or free parking somewhere else and walk, or they can choose to walk or bike and not look for parking at all. This is generally a difficult transition given the majority of parking in most cities and towns has been free for so long, but like any commodity it does cost money to create and maintain parking.



Prior to the meters being installed at La Fiesta Square, the parking lot was always full and often there were no spots available. Now, while there is a nominal fee to park, it is easier to find a space. In the 2017 parking survey, the maximum occupancy recorded in the La Fiesta Square lot was 88%, meaning that 28 spots of the 230 total were still available for parking. The meters help with the regulation of time limits, and the ability to ticket also makes enforcing the time limits more effective.

Long-term Parking: Employees and BART Parkers

Employees and commuters are willing to park further from their destination than shoppers because shoppers ultimately face a choice about where and when to patronize businesses whereas employees and commuters have less choice about their parking destinations. Parking meters are one way to combat long-term parking in impacted areas. Requiring developers to provide an employee parking management plan when seeking approvals is one way to alleviate this problem without building more parking.

BART parkers are some of the reason meters were installed on Oak Hill Road and Dolores Road. Meters in the private lots, have helped to curb employees parking all day in prime customer spaces. The goal with any meter is to ensure there is adequate turnover to allow everyone to park.

Cooperation and other physical barriers

Several downtown core parking lots are shared by multiple businesses. In many of these lots there is signage to indicate which spots are reserved for which businesses. So, three spaces may be allocated for

² Shoup, D. (2016, August 15). Cutting the Cost of Parking Requirements.

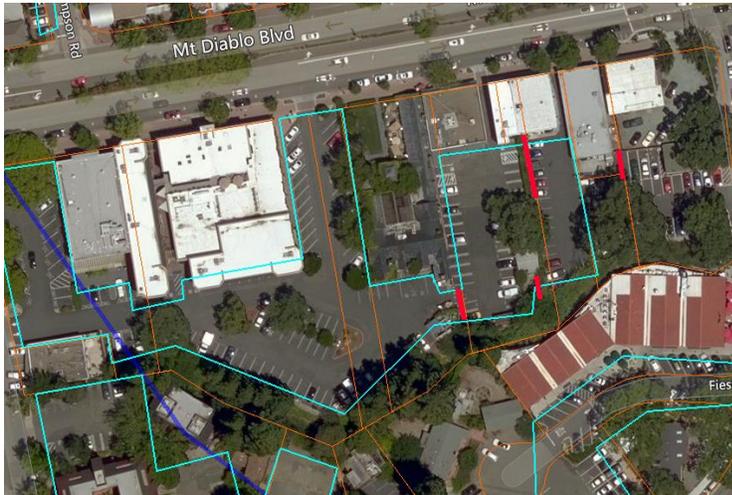


Figure 1. Parking lot area outlined in light blue. Fences or other barriers are depicted in red.

a restaurant, two for a salon and two for a retail space. These divisions reflect how tenants choose to share a space and may hinder the best utilization of parking stock.

There are parking lots in the downtown core area that are limited by fences and other barriers. For example, the lots that face Mt. Diablo Boulevard bounded by Lafayette Circle are limited by fencing and a natural barrier, the creek. Many of these lots have one narrow driveway between buildings to enter and exit; there is a significant opportunity in such lots for cooperation between businesses to create better

circulation for customers. Additionally, there is an opportunity to create a pedestrian walkway over the creek to better connect the downtown core for pedestrians in addition to connecting underutilized parking lots with impacted ones.

Another barrier that prevents the best utilization of existing parking spaces is gates. Some lots in the surveyed areas were gated because they contained work vehicles or the parking spaces were used for storage rather than to temporarily house a vehicle. For instance, the Mercantile lot is semi-public and free yet it was never utilized to its fullest potential during the private or public hours. This may be in part due to a gate that blocks the entry to the garage. The gate opens when cars drive up to it, but nonetheless may initially deter drivers.

Wayfinding and Signage

Wayfinding and public awareness about available parking is one significant barrier to finding parking, leading to the perception of a lack of parking. While conducting the occupancy study in February 2017 staff routinely found that in larger lots the parking closest to the businesses was full while there were many spaces remaining vacant in the lot.



Figure 2. The layout of La Fiesta Square, where the impact central parking area is routinely more impacted than the section of parking lot along Moraga Road

For example, in La Fiesta Square parking in the center of the lot was frequently impacted, however there were typically spaces available in the section of the lot closest to Moraga Road. This is in part due to the nature of the businesses being patronized, the way people enter and exit the lot and the surrounding streets. However, increased signage could direct people to these less utilized spaces or direct them to nearby public parking. The occupancy of La Fiesta Square fluctuated from 70-90% for the 230 available spaces for (from 12:00pm to 6:00pm) the most impacted times; however, further down the street, at 949 Moraga Boulevard, the paid

public lot there was never at an occupancy higher than 67% for the 58 public parking spaces available. This lot is not visible from La Fiesta Square, yet it is only 0.2 miles and an estimated 4 minute walk serving as a viable option for additional parking.

Other challenges

Beyond the challenges discussed above there are some secondary issues with the unequal distribution of parking, the perception that parking should be free and the desire to build more. For instance, the installation of parking meters can have a spillover effect, impacting neighborhood streets or adjacent businesses that do not have meters with drivers searching for free parking. Certainly, Fiesta Lane was impacted when La Fiesta Square installed meters. Subsequently, Fiesta Lane installed meters to generate turnover.

Another example of a secondary issue is latent demand. Developing a parking structure or new parking spaces could cause an increase in trip generation. If there is always easy and convenient parking right near a desired destination, it may be that a patron is more likely to drive to the next destination than keep the existing parking space they had and walk. This not only has an impact on the traffic and circulation network, but more parking decreases the livability, walkability and sustainability of the City.

Opportunities

The Parking Ordinance Committee has reviewed the issues and information available and has studied the problem as a whole, rather than on an individual parcel basis as the parking regulations have since they were created. The Committee believes to improve parking in the downtown a comprehensive management Strategy should include the following key elements:

- A majority of off-street parking and all on-street parking in the downtown should be made available and accessible to the public.
- All new development should be required to provide the amount of parking required by code (or contribute an in lieu fee.) The funds collected will be used to plan and implement parking management solutions.
- The solution should be district-based using the land use districts from the DSP, given the unique problems and attributes of each.
- The City should develop a list of tools to improve the supply, accessibility and efficiency of utilization of parking within each district.
- Incentives should be offered to property owners to encourage participation in the Strategy.
- The Strategy should address the long term parking needs for downtown employees and BART patrons. BART will be invited to participate financially in the Strategy.

The proposed solution is strategic management of the existing parking spaces and ensuring new development does not further increase demand without supporting the supply.

There is a perception of a lack of spaces in the City's downtown; however, as evidenced in the 2010 and 2017 inventory and occupancy surveys there are a significant number of spaces in the downtown. The spaces are not evenly distributed and are not always accessible to the general public so there is a perception of not enough supply. Sharing and managing existing resources will increase the availability of spaces, keep costs low and ensure the downtown is not dominated by parking lots and structures.

Parking management includes ideas like improving connections to adjacent lots and spaces, providing sufficient wayfinding, allowing everyone to park anywhere, encouraging walking and biking, encouraging parking once and walking, establishing long-term parking areas and using pricing to generate the turnover so there is always a space available. The goals and policies of the Downtown Parking Management Strategy are laid out in a table attached to this report.

Overall goals of the parking strategy are to:

1. Encourage attractive, small-town development.
2. Preserve the existing fabric of the downtown.
3. Protect neighborhoods and Lafayette citizens.
4. Maintain a strong commercial retail district that is not constrained by a lack of adequate parking.
5. Foster a self-supporting parking system that does not require subsidies from the City.
6. Improve the utilization of existing underutilized parking.
7. Create a system which offers flexibility and certainty and that is easy to understand and implement.
8. Reduce parking demand by encouraging transportation options to BART and the downtown that do not require vehicle parking.

Implementation

To be successful, the Parking Management Strategy will require the support of policy makers and the cooperation of downtown property owners, businesses and residents. Today, responsibilities associated with parking are spread across many City departments – planning, engineering, finance and police. To improve customer service and increase efficiency, all matters related to parking should ideally be handled by one person in the City offices. This individual would:

1. Issue parking permits.
2. Collect in lieu fees.
3. Adjust meter pricing based on demand.
4. Work with property owners to encourage shared parking.
5. Offer incentives to employees to use alternative modes of transportation.
6. Handle minor exceptions to the code.
7. Shepherd parking variance applications through the Planning Commission’s review.
8. Manage the updates to the parking inventory and occupancy surveys every two years.

Any effective solution will be one that is flexible, working with economic demands and changing modes of transit as lifestyles and technology shift.

The Numbers

The result of the recent parking survey yielded 11,408 total parking spaces in the downtown. While the majority of spaces are on private property (off-street) the City owns 462 public parking spaces on seven lots. The breakdowns of these two statistics are shown in the tables below.

On-Street Parking	1732 spaces
Off-Street Parking	9676 spaces

Public Parking Spaces

Lot	Extent of Public Parking	Spaces	Metered or Unmetered	Utilization
Mercantile	Public on weekends and evenings	188 spaces	Unmetered	Never exceeded 85%
Lafayette Library	Fully public	81 spaces	Unmetered	Max of 95% occupancy on Wednesday, never exceeded 85% on Saturday
3501 Golden Gate Way	Fully public	26 spaces	Metered	Never exceeded 85%
3511 Golden Gate Way	Public on weekends and evenings	20 spaces	Unmetered	
EcoVive	Fully public	39 spaces	Unmetered	
Gazebo	Leased	30 spaces	Unmetered	
949 Moraga Road	Fully public	58 spaces	Metered	Never exceeded 67% occupancy

Conclusion

There are many goals outlined in the Parking Management Strategy, all of which work toward achieving the overarching objective of making parking available to the public and making efficient use of existing resources. Other important elements of the revised regulations include keeping the existing building stock, providing a self-funding parking system with meter money and in-lieu fees, improving the utilization of existing underutilized parking through management, providing flexibility and certainty for property owners, and creating a system that is easy to understand and implement for the public and staff.

Parking has an enormous effect on the look, feel, form and function of the downtown. The importance of the Strategy is to allow for the City’s economic growth, while maintaining the balance of existing and new development. Staff finds that implementation of the parking Strategy through a central “parking office” and the adoption of the updated parking regulations will allow utilization of the existing resources in a more efficient manner and maintain the existing small town character of the downtown.

Attachments

1. Downtown Parking Management Strategy Table
2. 2017 Comprehensive Inventory and Occupancy Survey

Works Cited

2015 Targeted Study Area

2017 Comprehensive Inventory and Occupancy Survey

[Lafayette Downtown Specific Plan](#)

[Downtown Design Guidelines](#)

Billington, S. D. (October 1978). *Off-Street Parking: Three Commercial Centers* (Report).

Shoup, D. (2016. August 15). Cutting the Cost of Parking Requirements. Retrieved April 14, 2017, from Workshop comments and summary

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