



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 2354)

Report Type: Informational Report

Meeting Date: 12/19/2011

Summary Title: Downtown Parking Program Activities

Title: Update on Downtown Parking Program Activities

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Planning and Community Environment

This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

Executive Summary

This staff report provides an update to the City Council on the status of the Parking Program elements underway and planned for 2012 including a schedule of key milestones. The City began an analysis of the City's Parking Program in Spring 2011 to identify strategies to help more efficiently manage the City's parking infrastructure in the City's Downtown and California Avenue parking assessment districts. Current efforts to date have been focused in the Downtown, including assessing the use of surface lots, parking garages, and on-street parking. Program elements in Downtown and outreach to the California Avenue Business District will continue into next year as outlined in this report with Council consideration of the Residential Permit Parking Program no later than July 2012. A Downtown Parking Community Group of business representatives and Professorville and other nearby residents will work collaboratively and in parallel with staff to assess the impacts of parking on in downtown residential areas and to develop recommendations for the Residential Permit Parking Program.

Background

The City has two parking assessment districts, one in the Downtown (University Avenue) and one in the California Avenue area. Each district has developed unique strategies to manage its parking supply and demand, including the use of permit parking for employees within each district, designated parking spaces for permit holders, and hourly parking enforcement. The City is responsible for the oversight and development of parking management strategies.

In addition, the Palo Alto Downtown (PAD) Business and Professional Association - Parking Committee (Downtown Parking Committee) and the California Avenue Business District (BACA) help guide the development of parking strategies with staff. Attachment A provides additional information on the City's current parking management system, and roles of the PAD Downtown

Parking Committee and the California Avenue Business District in developing the City's parking management program.

Many residents of the Downtown District, Professorville neighborhood and nearby streets are affected by non-residential neighborhood traffic and parking and have voiced strong concerns to the City about parking overload in the neighborhoods. Visitor parking along the streets prevent residents from parking in proximity to their homes affecting neighborhood livability. Staff's parking analysis supports the contention that these streets are heavily parked during weekday working hours, and believe that most of the overflow is coming from downtown or SOFA employees. The business community has also voiced strong concerns about the availability of on-street parking and maximizing the efficiency of parking resources to support the vitality of the downtown business district.

An analysis of the City's parking management strategies began in April as part of the Transportation Work Plan for 2011. Staff held a study session with the Planning and Transportation Commission in August 2011, a Study Session with Council in September 2011, and a series of meetings with the community to solicit input on parking strategies. Staff identified and began work on a number of enhancements, primarily focused on elements in the Downtown District, to make the City's Parking Program more efficient, allow for improved enforcement, provide more accessibility to employees who rely on parking availability, preserve valuable on-street parking for patrons of each district, and to preserve the quality of life of adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Discussion

Since the City Council Study Session on September 12, 2011, staff has continued to advance a number of elements of the City's Parking Program. An update on the development of the Residential Permit Parking Program, California Avenue Parking Program, current and planned parking management enhancements, and the schedule for developing the ongoing elements planned for 2012 are discussed below.

Residential Permit Parking (RPP) Program

During the City Council Study Session on the parking management strategies held in September 2011 several Council members expressed interest in the formation of a Downtown Parking Community Group to help provide direct feedback to staff on proposed parking management strategies and to allow residents an opportunity to share their insight regarding the potential parking intrusion impacts to their quality of life directly to merchants. Staff initiated the formation of a Downtown Parking Community Group and has outreached to select residents to participate on a new group. The PAD Parking Committee has also expressed interest in participating in the new group and has identified representatives. The first meeting of the new Downtown Parking Community Group is scheduled for December 22, 2011. The timing of the new Downtown Parking Community Group aligns with the parking management work plan for the new year outlined in this report.

The Downtown Parking Community Group's schedule of work will proceed in parallel to other parking management objectives and the purpose of the group is to:

- Monitor the effects of parking strategies developed and implemented by the City;
- Evaluate the reasons that people are not using existing parking;
- Outline options to pursue, including pilot RPP approaches; and
- Developing an RPP Policy that outlines participation requirements, fee structure, process, and how to treat various land use types other than single-family residential (multi-family, commercial, institutional).

The Downtown Parking Community Group will be comprised of up to five members from the Downtown residential neighborhoods (self-appointed) and up to five members from the Parking Committee or other downtown businesses (appointed by Palo Alto Downtown and the Chamber of Commerce). Staff members from the Department of Planning and Community Environment, the Police Department, Administrative Services, and the Manager's Office would participate as needed. Staff also expects that any program, if implemented, would be revenue-neutral to the City, as directed previously by Council. Staff will also seek input from other neighborhoods, particularly Downtown North, but the focus of this effort will be Professorville, since there is a strong core interest among residents there.

At the initial meeting of the Downtown Parking Community Group a schedule for future meetings will be discussed. Staff expects that the group to meet three to four times and then staff will report to the Planning and Transportation Commission and present recommendations to the City Council no later than July 2012. Staff believes that the Downtown Parking Community Group can provide valuable insight to help build consensus within the community on projects before they are considered for policy implementation.

California Avenue Parking Program

The California Avenue Business District does not currently have a business committee similar to the Downtown Parking Committee, through which parking strategy and policy can be easily discussed. Staff believes that the newly formed Business Association of California Avenue (BACA) will be a valuable partner in helping to provide a forum for merchants to meet regularly on projects of interest and for staff to solicit insight and merchant perspective on proposed projects. Staff is working with the new BACA representatives to schedule regular meetings at which Parking Management Strategies can be discussed. Staff anticipates developing recommendations for California Avenue parking strategies in October 2012.

Prior to the formation of BACA, staff conducted outreach to California Avenue area merchants in July to discuss potential parking management strategies for their consideration including wayfinding signage and permit distribution solutions. The input from merchants was extremely valuable and there was a strong interest in collecting more data to help make better informed

decisions. Since that initial meeting staff has collected additional parking occupancy and permit use data that will be shared upon the first BACA meeting in the year.

Parking Program elements to be discussed with the California Avenue community will include:

- Parking Permit Management System, which will also cover California Avenue permits
- Parking Wayfinding Banners and Signs, similar to that proposed for Downtown
- Enhancing the number of spaces available off-street and in garages
- Limited day permit use distribution to minimize abuse and misuse with the current system
- Improved distinction between permit and visitor parking spaces to make most efficient and equitable use of each

Parking Permit Management System Replacement

The City completed a Request for Proposals process in November 2011 and selected Progressive Solutions to develop and implement its Parking Permit Management System for Palo Alto. Existing permit holders from Downtown will, in the first quarter of 2012, be asked to update their contact and Downtown employer information. Possession of a parking permit in Downtown is a benefit to the businesses located within the Parking Assessment District. The City has never validated the Downtown employment status of permit holders. Having accurate parking permit holder data as part of the new system implementation is absolutely critical in making the distribution of permits more efficient and ensures that additional parking strategies can be considered for discussion with stakeholders such as the PAD Parking Committee. The updated system is also just a necessary improvement independent of parking permit space usage to demonstrate effective parking management. Permit holders who cannot validate their downtown employer status will not be renewed at their renewal date.

The City anticipates the new permit management system to be completed and implemented by Spring 2012. The new system will offer permit holders an online renewal option and potential permit holders will be able to register online. Currently, existing permit holders and potential permit holders may register for a Wait List for any two parking facilities. After the system implementation, Wait List registration will be limited to one facility only to help ensure more efficient distribution of permits. The new system will automatically notify persons on the Wait List of their permit availability.

The new system will provide the City's two Parking Assessment Districts to explore opportunities for new parking permit fee structures previously not feasible due to technology limitations. The PAD Parking Committee will be asked to consider several new parking permit distribution strategies in the spring 2012 so that new policy recommendations can then be considered by the City Council as part of the new Fee Schedule Program for 2012-13:

- Top Floor Only Permits: These permits can be offered at a discount to persons whom are not able to pay for a normal permit but restrict their parking to the top floor of a parking garage.

- **Employer Bank of Permits:** These permits introduce an opportunity for permits to be registered to a business rather than an employee so that as the company grows its staff, new employees can immediately begin parking at permit facilities rather than having to wait for distribution off a Wait List. Larger employers in Downtown have already expressed an interest in this type of permit to accommodate growth and visitor needs. As gate control systems are introduced into parking facilities, Employer Bank of Permits also offer flexibility for multiple permits to be distributed but with limited access to accommodate business employee shift requirements.
- **Fleet Vehicle Permits:** Provide for employers with vehicle fleets that require overnight storage within a parking structure.
- **Non District Permits:** Proposed for distribution on a trial basis with the support of the Parking Assessment Districts, can provide access to selected parking structures to benefit employees in the South of Forest Avenue (SOFA) district which has seen increased office use over the past several years. Employees in SOFA currently cannot obtain parking permits.
- **Tiered Hourly Parking:** Tiered pricing allows visitors to park in facilities beyond the 3-hour Free parking limit for a fee up to the maximum \$16.00 per day fee. The rate structure for parking beginning in the 4th hour will require merchant and parking assessment district input.
- **Tiered Permit Fee Cost:** Permits are currently offered on a quarter or annual basis. Pricing for monthly permits will be introduced and considerations for the continuation of annual discounts discussed to ensure maximum distribution flexibility to new employees of the Parking Assessment Districts.

Way-Finding Signage to Parking Facilities

On November 3, 2011, the Architectural Review Board reviewed and approved the design of new banners designed to highlight the location of Free Public Parking facilities at surface lots and parking garages, see Figure 3 – Downtown Parking Banner Sample.

The Phase I deployment of the new parking banners will be installed in December 2011 and be placed on streetlights within the surface lots and adjacent to streetlights at parking garages. Staff estimates that approximately 50 banners will be installed as part of Phase 1 deployment. Phase 2 will include the installation of banner poles at locations where existing streetlights were not available or feasible for use as part of Phase I. Phase 2 will benefit facilities such as Ramona/University (Lot B) and the 801 High Street garages located beneath retail or residential structures.

In the Spring of 2012, staff will return to the Architectural Review Board for their input on wayfinding signage to replace the existing industry standards “White P on Green Background” signs. The new signs will match the color and modern architecture of the new banners, laying the foundation for the development of new marketing materials to highlight parking facilities.

For the California Avenue Business District, the use of similar banners and wayfinding signage will be proposed to merchants and members of the new Business Association of California Avenue (BACA) in January 2012.

Daily Parking Permit Distribution

Beginning in January 2012 the City will be replacing its existing paper Daily Permit forms sold to businesses or persons seeking daylong parking at on- or off-street facilities. During discussions with Community Service Officers (CSOs) who conduct parking enforcement in the City, the use of illegally fabricated paper Daily Permits was identified as a frequent occurrence. The new Coded Scratcher Daily Permits will allow for only one day use and easier validation by CSOs. This modification is being implemented immediately to help ensure that the City’s parking management program is managed efficiently. The new Coded Scratcher Daily Permits will be used for both the Downtown and California Avenue Business Districts.

Within Downtown, two parking garages currently have Day Permit distribution machines that allow visitors to purchase a Day Permit on-site at a fee of \$16 per day. The machines are currently located in the Bryant St Garage (Lots S/L) and the Cowper/Webster Garage (Lot CW). The distribution of additional Day Permit distribution machines has been discussed with the

Figure 3
Downtown Parking
Banner Sample



Parking Committee. Staff is recommending the deferral of additional machines until Pilot Gate Control and Hourly Parking Fee Structures are considered by the PAD Parking Committee because if gate control systems would provide the same function as the Day Permit distribution machines. As technology is researched it will be presented to the PAD Parking Committee for input prior to the distribution of Requests for Proposals from vendors.

Pilot Gate Control and Hourly Parking Fee Structure

The existing Downtown Palo Alto Color Zone Parking Management System provides for three-hour parking within Visitor parking spaces in garages. Staff will work with the Parking Community Group and the PAD Parking Committee to consider the installation of gate access controls to at least one parking garage next year, the Bryant Street Garage (Lot S/L). The gate controls will allow visitors to park beyond the existing three hour parking limit for a fee, beginning with the fourth hour and up to the daily parking rate of \$16/day, allowing for longer stays within the downtown for shopping activities. The tiered hourly fee structure will also be included in the discussions with the Parking Committee and the PAD Parking Committee.

Permit holders within garages with gate controls would gain entry through either a manual scan card or automatic card reader, depending upon a selected system vendor. Color-coded permit stickers affixed to vehicles will still be required initially to easily identify normal permit holders, new Top Floor Only permit holders, and to discourage permit holder use of Visitor parking spaces. A policy restricting permit holder parking in Visitor parking spaces will be required.

Access gate controls also offer the benefit of estimating parking garage capacity to help develop and implement Parking Guidance System (PGS) Signage technology discussed below. Depending upon the final resolution of the various proposed parking fee structures with the Parking Committee in the Spring, proposals for the pilot access gate control projects will be solicited in the Summer for implementation of a pilot project in the Fall. A two-year pilot may be necessary to monitor and measure effects of the system.

Parking Guidance System (PGS) Technology Development

Staff is currently researching technology that will allow the City to monitor the time-use of both on-street and off-street parking spaces. Parking data collected by staff to-date has been focused on "occupancy" to determine the number of vehicles parked on the street or in off-street facilities during various times of the day. The City has no data or cost-effective method to determine how long vehicles are parked.

Existing technology from companies such as Streetline networks (www.streetline.com) allow for the monitoring and distribution of parking space availability information to users of the system through smartphone applications. The City has investigated the use of such a system for Palo Alto, but the system requires a monthly fee for parking spaces monitored. Palo Alto does not currently charge a fee for on-street parking and allows time-limit free parking at off-street

facilities, making the use of such a system infeasible due to cost with no offsetting revenues. Staff is researching the development of its own monitoring infrastructure that is built on the National Transportation Communications for ITS Protocol (NTCIP), allowing for potential integration with separate traffic signal management system projects scheduled for the calendar year 2012.

Parking Occupancy Monitoring

Staff has completed the collection of parking occupancy data for both the Downtown and California Avenue Business Districts for the spring 2011 and fall 2011 seasons. Additional parking occupancy data for off-street parking facility in Downtown for the Holiday shopping season is being collected in December.

Data collection on parking trends and driver behavior is critical as decisions on future parking strategies are developed. The City is committed to providing accurate data to the PAD Parking Committee, future BACA members, and City Council so that we can work in partnership with each other to manage our resources.

Timeline

A timeline for implementing the Parking Program update reflecting the various tasks above is provided in Table 1. below and included as Attachment B.

**Table 1. Parking Program Activities
Schedule & Key Milestones**

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULE
City Council Study Session	September 2011
Permit Management System	September 2011 - February 2012
Fall Occupancy Data Collection #2	October 2011
Parking Banners	October 2011 - January 2012
Winter Occupancy Data Collection #3	December 2011
Residential Permit Parking (Working Group)	December 2011 - July 2012
Way Finding Signage	January 2012 - April 2012
California Avenue Parking Strategies	January 2012 - October 2012
Permit Fee Development	February 2012 - September 2012
Downtown Community Meeting	March 2012
Garage Access Controls Pilot	April 2012 - October 2012
Parking Monitoring	June 2012 - April 2013
City Council Considers Residential Permit Parking Program	July 2012
Install Bike Parking and Corrals	Ongoing
Parking Technology Research & Development	On-going

Resource Impacts

The Parking Program Update 2012 effort is primarily funded through the City's Capital Improvements Program (CIP PL-12000, Parking & Transportation Improvements) and Downtown Parking Assessment District funds. Moving forward into 2012, the same fund sources will be used to further advance new parking management strategies. As program enhancements are identified and approved for implementation within the California Avenue Business District, the California Avenue Assessment District may also be used to help fund improvements.

Environmental Review

The Parking Program Update 2012 outlined in this report does not at this point require review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). As individual parking program projects are approved for implementation, they will be evaluated for compliance with CEQA as necessary.

Attachments:

- Attachment A (PDF)
- Attachment B: Parking Program Timeline 2012 (PDF)

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City Manager Approval:


James Keene, City Manager

Attachment A

The following provides additional information on the City's current parking management system, and roles of the PAD Downtown Parking Committee and the California Avenue Business District in developing the City's parking management program.

Palo Alto Downtown (PAD) Business and Professional Association – Parking Committee

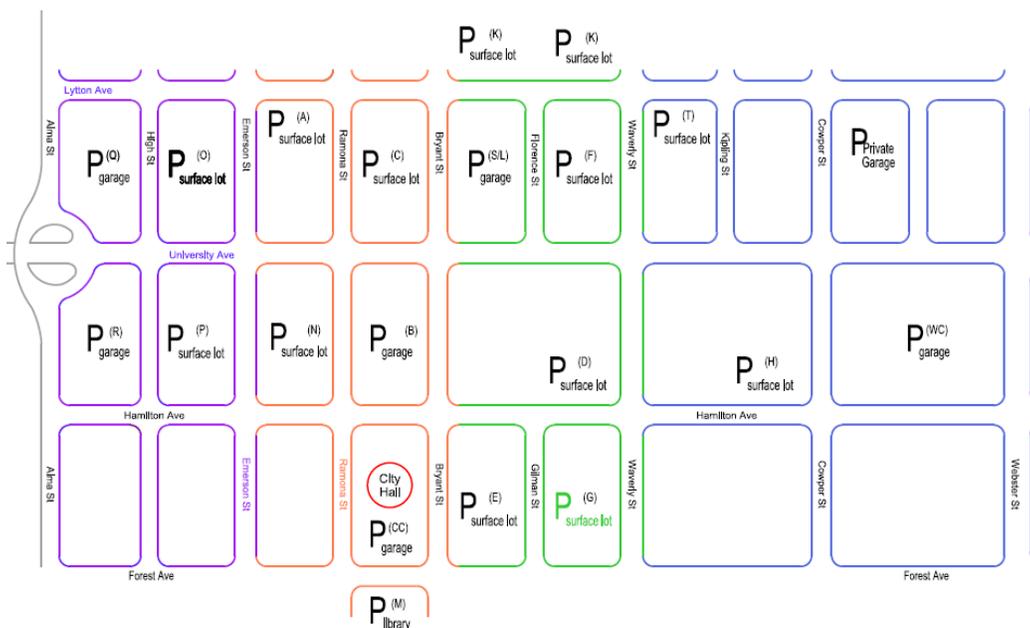
In the Downtown, the PAD Parking Committee guides the development of parking strategies with staff and helps to provide perspective regarding the performance and trends of the Downtown economic engine so that it can be taken into consideration during the development of policy. This collaboration with the PAD Parking Committee is on-going through monthly meetings to discuss varying types of concerns including on-street and off-street parking, public safety, etc.

The Downtown Parking Committee was instrumental in the development of the existing Color Zone Parking Management System which was designed to prevent employee parking in the downtown area and to increase the supply of convenient customer parking. Employee parking is provided in the seven parking garages in and around Downtown and the twelve surface lot facilities at a fee of \$135 per quarter or on an annual discount basis of \$420 per year. Figure 1 and Table 1 highlight the Downtown Palo Alto Color Zone Parking Management System boundaries and Number of Parking Spaces in Off-Street Parking Facilities, respectively.

Business Association of California Avenue (BACA)

The California Avenue Business District has recently reconstituted its business association, which will hopefully provide input on parking strategies in the coming year. Staff will be organizing monthly meeting with BACA starting next year to build a partnership similar to the PAD Parking Committee to allow an open communication forum for parking and other issues of interest to merchants on and along California Avenue.

**Figure 1
Downtown Palo Alto Color Zone Management System**



2012 Parking Program Activities

ATTACHMENT B



Sep-11

Apr-13

