



City Council

Parking Strategy Briefing

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Title

Parking Strategy Briefing

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a briefing on the City of Olympia Parking Strategy.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive a briefing on the City of Olympia Parking Strategy.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Chelsea Baker van Drood, Parking Services Program Specialist, Community Planning & Development

Background and Analysis:

The Downtown Parking Strategy provides short, mid and long-term actions to support Downtown goals.

Strategies include:

1. Implementing tools to manage the Parking Program and enforcement and improve customer convenience.
2. Improving on-street parking.
3. Reinvigorating off-street parking.
4. Improving access to downtown.
5. Addressing residential and employee parking
6. Addressing parking for arts, culture, and entertainment uses.
7. Improve disabled parking management.

Since its adoption in April 2019, staff have advanced implementation of the Parking Strategy and will present the City Council with the overall goals and the progress to date.

Climate Analysis:

The Parking Strategy, approved by City Council in 2019, is expected to result in both short and long-term reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by promoting alternative forms of transportation, minimizing the need to circle for parking, and promoting compact urban areas within the City. Properly managing existing parking infrastructure will reduce the need for adding new surface lots that significantly reduce urban density and have a carbon footprint of their own. Maintaining an on-street parking occupancy rate below 85% ensures that vehicles can find parking quickly, easily, and in close proximity to their destination. Occupancy rates higher than 85% cause drivers to hunt for parking spaces, which slows and congests traffic and needlessly uses fuel without adding miles to the overall distance traveled. The Parking Strategy includes guidelines for disincentivizing single occupancy driving, increasing public EV charging infrastructure, and making alternative modes of travel more attractive by improving public transit infrastructure and frequency, reducing transit fares, and improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Equity Analysis:

Paid parking does not create an equitable financial burden for everyone in our community. Vehicle owners with low incomes pay a higher percentage of their income when paying for parking or a citation than vehicle owners with moderate and high incomes. BIPOC individuals are more likely to have low incomes and be disproportionately affected by fees and fines. Parking Services addresses these disparities in a few different ways. People who have low incomes have the option of setting up a payment plan for citations so they can pay smaller amounts over a longer period of time, relieving some of the financial burden of receiving a parking ticket. They have the right to appeal citations and request a lower fee due to financial hardship and low-income residents of downtown can receive a 50% discount on residential parking permits.

Many of our lowest income residents do not own vehicles. According to ArcGIS data, 4.6% of occupied homes in Olympia do not have access to a vehicle. Households that do not have access to a vehicle tend to have lower incomes than those that do have access to a vehicle. All forms of parking - including on-street, surface lots, and garages - have costs associated with building and maintaining them, such as the costs of land use, concrete pouring, painting stall markings, lighting, cleaning, and crack sealing. When parking fees are paid by drivers, it provides a more equitable outcome than "free" parking that is paid for through higher prices on housing, goods, and services. Separating the cost of parking from the cost of other items gives vehicle owners a financial incentive to use other modes of transportation, which supports the city's climate goals, and completely removes the financial burden of parking from those who do not own a vehicle. Olympia is home to an award-winning public transit system which has been zero-fare since January 2020. The Parking Strategy promotes the use of our free public transit system for all individuals in the community and supports transit upgrades that make it a viable option for more people in our community regardless of income level or disability status. The Parking Strategy also promotes walking and biking by encouraging infrastructure changes that make alternative transportation methods safer, more comfortable, more convenient, and ADA compliant.

Maintaining an occupancy rate below 85% for all on-street parking is considered the gold standard in the parking and mobility industry. In our downtown, this usually translates to one open stall per block

face. Ensuring that there is at least one available space on every block face means that everyone can find a spot close to their destination, and a shorter distance for individuals with mobility issues to travel between their vehicle and their destination. This can be crucial for individuals with disabilities who want access to downtown amenities such as restaurants, retail stores, offices, and events. A four-hour time limit within the downtown core for vehicles displaying disability placards creates a barrier for individuals with disabilities parking for longer than four hours. They may have to park farther away from their destination in an area that does not have a time limit for disabled parking or re-park their vehicle when the time limit expires. The data collected as part of the Parking Strategy shows that the four-hour time limit for disabled parking is crucial for keeping the occupancy rate below 85% in the downtown core. The Parking Strategy recommends that vehicles with disabled parking privileges utilize off-street disabled parking stalls for long-term parking, and Parking Services promotes the use of Intercity Transit's free Dial-A-Lift service for individuals with disabilities who may need to access the downtown core for longer than four hours. Dial-A-Lift provides door-to-door transit service for community members with disabilities who are unable to walk far enough to utilize traditional public transit or require additional support for their mobility within Thurston County.

Using time limits to maintain an occupancy rate below 85% allows customers to easily park near businesses, which benefits the local economy, but workers and residents often have to park on the outskirts of the downtown core several blocks from their job site or home in designated long-term parking areas. Downtown workers and residents may not feel comfortable walking several blocks to their car, especially after dark, due to safety concerns. This disproportionately affects individuals who identify as female since they are more likely to experience sexual violence and may be stereotyped as less capable of self defense. The Parking Strategy supports the improvements proposed in the 2016 Downtown Strategy to increase safety such as improved lighting, better visibility, redevelopment of blighted properties, and increased patrols.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

A 2015 survey of downtown businesses revealed that parking is a top concern for businesses and customers.

Financial Impact:

There is no financial impact related to this briefing.

Options:

1. Receive the briefing.
2. Do not receive the briefing.
2. Schedule the briefing for another time.

Attachments:

Parking Strategy