

# City of Poulsbo

## Planning Department

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To: Mayor Erickson & City Council

From: Alyse Nelson, Associate Planner

Date: June 20, 2012

Subject: Downtown Parking Discussion: What is the Parking Problem?

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*Parking will never, by itself, lead to a revitalized downtown ... attractions bring people downtown, not available parking.” (Reining in the 800-Pound Gorilla, Kent Robertson, PhD)*

Downtown Poulsbo is an important part of the Poulsbo community – it is a vibrant core where locals and tourists come to shop, eat, and recreate. It is a popular destination, and there have been many attempts to study and analyze whether or not there is “parking problem” in downtown. The Planning Department has been involved in many of these studies, including two recent efforts that were completed in 2008 and 2010. In staff’s opinion, downtown Poulsbo does not have a parking “problem” with regard to the amount of parking available, but rather, the problem is largely a behavioral and managerial issue. If nothing else, it is appropriate to consider cost-effective, short-term strategies to free up the centralized parking for customers and then evaluate if there is still a shortage in parking stalls *before* more costly solutions are considered.

- **The parking problem is likely not a “numbers” issue.** There are approximately 1,199 parking stalls available in the downtown core. Using a parking requirement of 1 parking stall for every 300 square feet of commercial (whether office, retail, or restaurant space), the commercial building square footage existing would require 1,158 parking stalls. That means there are an extra 41 parking stalls in downtown – based on just commercial uses. The Port of Poulsbo has 250 permanent moorage slips – this would require 125 parking spaces (based on today’s standards). With the parking they’ve built recently at the old Armory site, they have a 54-stall deficit. Looking at occupied parking data from David Evans, Anderson Parkway, the Waterfront sub-lot, King Olav and Front Street are the only parking areas in downtown operating at 100% capacity – and only for several hours a day. By focusing first on pushing long-term users to less-centralized parking locations, up to 60 spaces could be freed up for short-term users.
- **Parking is partially a location issue.** When we break downtown into sub areas, the numbers indicate an excess of parking in the northern downtown and a deficit of parking in the central core. There are about 152 parking stalls over what would be “required” to serve

the buildings in the northern area. There is a deficit of about 111 stalls in the core downtown. Since tourists do not necessarily know about parking further out of the core, there may feel like there is a lack of parking in downtown because the key lots are full. We should not expect visitors to the community to know where the outlying parking areas are, but the locals do, especially the downtown business owners and their employees.

- **Parking is a managerial issue.** During peak weekday hours, long-term users are occupying nearly a quarter of available public parking in Anderson Parkway, the smaller waterfront parking lot, and Front Street through downtown (David Evans report). King Olav has over 70 stalls utilized by long-term users between 10:00 am until 2:00 pm on weekdays. This is over 60 percent of its available parking. The David Evans report discusses three user groups of parking:
  - Short-term users (visitors & customers) should have access to the most convenient parking spaces with time restrictions which allow users adequate time to conduct their business.
  - Long-term users (employees, Port users, residents) should park in outlying areas or utilize alternative forms of transportation. “Typically municipalities do not provide convenient, free parking for long-term users.”
  - Service users such as delivery trucks, which provide a necessary support for downtown businesses and need convenient and larger spaces to park.

Again, if those working in downtown consume the most convenient and obvious parking, the fact that visitors can’t find parking should come as no surprise.

- **Employees & other long-term users are parking in prime spaces.** The 2006 Parametrix study indicated up to 80 parking stalls were being used by employees within downtown. Assuming a parking stall used by a long-term user (employee, resident, etc.) could turnover 3 times in a day if available for customer use, and assuming that each time it turned over it would generate approximately \$20 in revenue, a parking stall in downtown Poulsbo can generate \$60 in daily sales. If that is possible 300 days a year, that means the annual retail value of a parking stall is approximately \$18,000. Assuming that out of the 200 -300 employees in downtown, 60 are parking in either the waterfront lot or on Front Street, Poulsbo is losing out on approximately \$1,080,000 in annual retail revenue. Frankly, if one calculates lost revenue on all parking used by employees and employers then that number could be as high as \$3 million. (The \$20/trip and 300 shopping days/year figure come from Rick Williams, a parking consultant in Oregon.)

*“Every downtown likes to blame its woes on parking. Frequently, people perceive that there is a parking problem if they cannot park directly in front or behind the actual business they are visiting. Often, the supply of parking in downtown is adequate; yet, the directional signage to the parking is non-existent ... This circumstance surely makes the case for better downtown parking management, consistent clear signage, and enforcement of parking regulations. It’s almost never about more space.”*  
(Kent Robertson, PhD)

- **If parking is a management issue, what do we focus on first? Changing behavior.**  
There are many ways to change behavior of downtown parking users. They generally follow two main paths: disincentives (paid parking, enforcement) and incentives (carpool benefits, bus passes).
- The 2008 DEA study had this basic philosophy: Reserve parking in Anderson Parkway and Front Street for short-term users and service vehicles. Long-term users should park in outlying lots, such as the King Olav lot. “Parking time limits, with adequate enforcement, and/or paid parking are the strategies that will best achieve this philosophy.”
- The 2010 Final Report had a variety of suggestions that would impact user behavior, including:
  - Improve signage and establish a public education campaign identifying public downtown parking areas and the importance of employer’s and employee’s leaving the prime spaces for customers.
  - Improvements to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue (Item 5) – these changes will help shift the negative perspective of 3<sup>rd</sup> as an unsafe street from a pedestrian safety viewpoint. This should increase the number of employees willing to park on 3<sup>rd</sup>, particularly if combined with parking fees or enforcement in closer-in parking areas.
  - Overnight Parking (Item 3) – which might be expanded to become an overnight parking permit program that could include downtown residents/marina guests and other users to purchase an overnight parking permit. A program might also be implemented for longer-duration parking, such as a monthly parking permit for residents/employees attached to certain spaces throughout downtown.
  - Parking Fees and Enforcement (Item 4) – charging a fee at Anderson Parkway and on Front Street within the downtown core will trigger a shift of employee parking to outlying parking lots and streets.
  - Specialized Parking Needs (Item 7) – as areas of downtown are marked for motorcycles and bikes, more users may be encouraged to switch transportation mode.
- Other solutions?
  - Develop an employee/long-term parking lot – one potential location would be the old museum site on Jensen.
  - Limited paid parking by permit in downtown parking lots.