

SUSTAINABLE SARATOGA POLICY ON MANAGED PARKING IN SARATOGA SPRINGS

WHY SHOULD SUSTAINABLE SARATOGA HAVE A POLICY ON MANAGED PARKING?

Over the past 40 years, parking has been a “hot button” land use issue for downtown Saratoga Springs. The delay in adopting a comprehensive parking management plan has been costly to our city’s resources and environment and has allowed the inefficient use of valuable downtown land devoted to parking to continue. A well-managed parking program will contribute to our city’s long-term sustainability by supporting the economic vitality of local businesses, reducing traffic congestion, and encouraging alternative forms of transportation

For many years, Saratoga Springs has maintained a largely hands-off parking policy for the downtown area that relies on “free” public parking and the costly construction of parking garages to increase parking capacity. The policy is causing the following problems:

- **Parking spaces in high demand are not turning over.** With cost-free parking and a predominately two-hour parking limit, parking spaces in the downtown core are not turning over at a rate that reflects their value. Local businesses depend on high curbside turnover rates.
- **Unmanaged parking leads to traffic congestion and air pollution.** Because of low curbside turnover rates, drivers often cruise around downtown streets looking for available parking, causing traffic congestion, air pollution, and visitor frustration. The lack of adequate signage and real-time information about parking availability contributes to congestion.
- **Divided departmental responsibility reduces accountability and management efficiency.** Parking management is currently divided among four different City departments. The public is not sure who is in control or how to influence decisions. Without a single department in charge, the existing program does not foster coordinated long-range planning, maintenance or capital investments.
- **The cost of parking is not known or fairly assigned.** Our current free parking program is actually far from free. Because individual users are not charged, all costs are borne by taxpayers. A substantial cut of City taxes pays for parking garage construction and maintenance, paving, plowing, striping, cleaning, signage, and enforcement. Because there are no city budget line items for parking-related expenses, there is no way to determine how much our current parking program really costs.
- **Available parking technologies have not been employed.** A number of new computer technologies could help improve parking efficiency and planning.
- **Parking is not managed as part of a comprehensive transportation program.** The promotion of alternative modes of transportation could reduce parking demand and costs.



- **Off-street parking occupies valuable land that should be put to better use.** Parking is not a high-value use of developable land. Lands devoted to off-street public and private parking garages and surface lots should be put to more economically productive uses.

THE CONCEPT OF MANAGED PARKING IS EVOLVING

Over the years, transportation planners have worked to develop a new concept of managed parking. Donald Soup, one of the early advocates of managed parking, published Free Parking as a Transportation Problem in 1980 and The High Cost of Free Parking in 2011, which spurred parking studies and led to the development of new parking theories. There is abundant evidence that free-parking policies subsidize cars, degrade urban design, encourage sprawl, impede walkability, burden local economies, raise housing costs, and penalize people who either cannot afford a car or choose not to own one.

Managed parking is a set of policies, programs and techniques that result in a more efficient use of parking resources and an improved transportation system. Parking is an economic commodity that must be managed effectively to get the most value out of it. Managed parking systems are custom-fit to each community. The system for a particular city is best designed by transportation professionals who work closely with civic and business leaders. Managed parking programs can start small and adjust over time.

Key to every successful managed parking program is appropriate pricing for high-demand parking spaces. With today's new technologies, it is easy to set and adjust prices by area and by season.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARKING STUDIES IN SARATOGA SPRINGS

In Saratoga Springs, over the last 40 years there have been more than a dozen downtown parking studies. The most recent have concluded that the city should develop and implement a managed parking program that includes a pricing component.

On June 10, 2014, Sustainable Saratoga adopted "Smart Land Use in Saratoga Springs." Principle 8 of the policy calls for the development of a parking management plan for the downtown area.

In January 2015, Sustainable Saratoga organized two community forums under the heading, "Solutions for Downtown Parking and Transportation:"

1. Michael Manville: "Parking, Transportation and Development: Balancing Priorities"
2. Lisa Jacobson: "From the Field: Lessons from Other Communities"

Both speakers called for a new, more sustainable approach to parking, including appropriate pricing, as an alternative to our system of free parking. A video and written summary are available for each presentation.



In 2015 the Saratoga Springs Finance Department funded a study by Camoin Associates that estimated paid on-street parking would raise gross annual revenues of \$0.8-1.2 million, and paid off-street parking would bring in additional revenues of \$0.5-1.5 million.

In late 2015, the Saratoga Springs City Council created a Downtown Parking Task Force. In the Spring of 2016, the task force released its report, recommending that the City create a unified and efficient parking management plan and policy for the downtown area. The report included several statements relating to parking pricing and revenue distribution. On July 15, 2016, Sustainable Saratoga submitted a letter to the City Council endorsing the recommendations of the task force. On August 2, 2016, the City Council unanimously adopted the task force report as policy.

On April 16, 2018, Sustainable Saratoga submitted a letter to the City Council supporting the concept of developing and implementing a managed parking program. On April 27, 2018, the Saratogian newspaper published Sustainable Saratoga's "Speaking Out" piece urging implementation of a downtown managed parking plan.

On November 20, 2019, at a City public forum on parking, the chair of Sustainable Saratoga read a statement that recommended the implementation of the 2016 Downtown Parking Task Force managed parking program. On December 6, 2019, Sustainable Saratoga sent a follow-up letter to the Commissioner of Public Safety urging that the City prepare a request for proposals for a consultant to develop a managed parking program.

SUSTIANABLE SARATOGA'S POLICY ON MANAGED PARKING

- A. Sustainable Saratoga recognizes that parking management consists of a set of policies, programs and techniques that results in a more efficient use of parking resources and an improved transportation system. The managed parking program must be comprehensive and tailored to meet the specific needs of our community, including residents, tourists, local businesses, and their employees. It must accommodate alternative modes of transportation. If managed successfully, vehicle parking becomes an economic commodity with high value. Free-market business principles are applied to ensure that high-demand parking spaces are optimally priced to achieve equity, availability, turnover and efficiencies. Parking revenues are invested in public improvements beneficial to the downtown area, including utility upgrades, streetscape amenities such as street trees, street lights, and sidewalks, and "complete streets" infrastructure to make downtown more walkable, bikeable, and accessible for people with disabilities.
- B. Sustainable Saratoga endorses the City Council's August 2, 2016 adoption of the report of the Downtown Parking Task Force as policy. Report recommendations included the development of a comprehensive parking management plan and policy for the downtown area. The report called for the following steps:



- The City Council should establish and fund an “Office of Downtown Parking Management” that would report to a designated City department. The office could be run by one part-time person, at an annual cost of approximately \$50,000.
 - The Council should establish an 11-member volunteer advisory board to assist the new Office of Downtown Parking Management.
 - The City should solicit bids and select a professional parking management firm to design and implement a new parking management plan.
- C. Through the process of working with community stakeholders, the chosen consulting firm would develop a managed parking program for Saratoga Springs for consideration by the City Council. The proposed program might include measures similar to those implemented in other cities, such as:
- **A well-marked traffic loop** to assist motorists in their search for municipal parking lots and garages. For example, visitors entering downtown from the south would be instructed to travel down Spring Street, along Putnam Street and Maple Avenue back to Broadway, then on to Walton Street, Woodlawn Avenue, Division Street, Railroad Place, Federal Street, and Congress Street until they found parking.
 - **The use of smart technology** to identify parking availability in public lots and garages in real time.
 - **The installation of smart “park and display” ticket machines** on Broadway and streets several blocks on either side. To encourage frequent turnover of parking spaces, these machines could be set to charge higher prices during daily peak use periods, and lower prices at other times. Municipal lots and garages also could have pricing structures that varied from peak to non-peak hours.
 - **The establishment of a parking fee structure that would incentivize alternative transportation methods**, like shuttles, buses, biking and walking. An optimized fee structure would encourage frequent turnover of parking spaces, allowing more people to visit downtown while reducing the need for additional parking lots and structures.
 - **Designated periphery permit parking for employees, and designated overnight permit parking for downtown residents.** These accommodations would make the system less financially burdensome on downtown workers and residents, while maintaining cost incentives that would encourage people to use alternative transportation.
 - **Free parking for the first half hour**, or the first few hours of the business day.
 - **Free parking during periods of lower demand**, such as the winter months.
 - **The investment of the majority of parking revenues in downtown improvements**, such as lighting, signage, sidewalks, street trees and landscaping, parking space maintenance and enforcement.
 - **More frequent CDTA bus trips to and from downtown.** Better bus service would encourage people to leave their cars home.
 - **Encouragement for the private sector to build more fee parking** to reduce public sector costs.



The potential benefits of a managed parking system are:

- Fewer cars and less pollution in the downtown area
- A substantial dedicated revenue source for downtown infrastructure
- More customer visitation and increased economic activity at local businesses
- A more diverse array of transportation options
- A more sustainable and environmentally friendly community

D. Sustainable Saratoga should prepare educational materials about managed parking and make the materials available to the public.

This policy was adopted by the Land Use Committee on March 10, 2020, and by the Board of Directors on June 15, 2020.

