

10/11/2023

Honorable Ronald Kim, Mayor
Dillon Moran, Commissioner of Accounts
Minita Sanghvi, Commissioner of Finance
James Montagino, Commissioner of Public Safety
Jason Golub, Commissioner of Public Works
City Hall
474 Broadway
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

RE: Managed Parking

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

It has recently been reported that the Saratoga Springs City Council is considering implementing new policies relating to downtown parking. Sustainable Saratoga has promoted new downtown parking policies for years. We have sponsored two public forums on downtown parking, have considered a substantial amount of research and have made numerous statements at public meetings.

We would like to share with you the work we have done. Attached for your review is our policy statement entitled, “Sustainable Saratoga Policy on Managed Parking in Saratoga Springs.”. This document was adopted by our organization’s Board of Directors in 2020. We hope this information is helpful as you develop a new managed parking program and process for downtown Saratoga Springs.

If you have any questions about our statement, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Dianna Goodwin, Chair



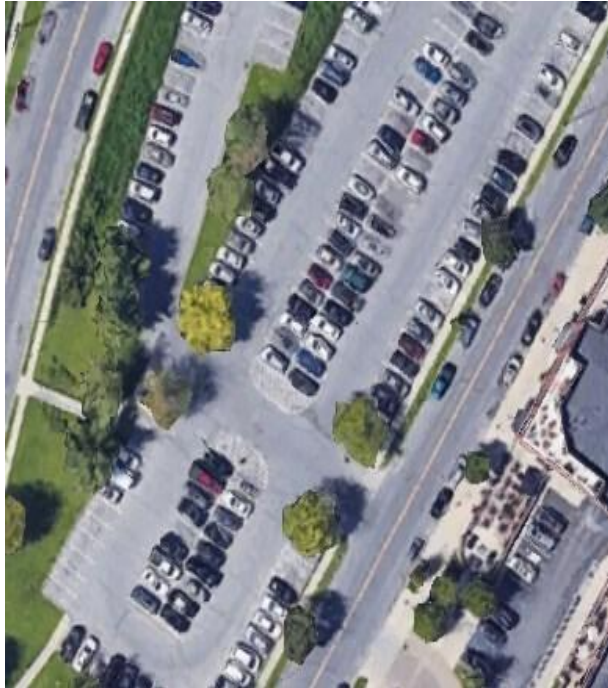
Kelsey Trudell, Executive Director



Board of Directors: Anne Ernst, Laura Faulk, Dianna Goodwin (Chair), Sarah Goodwin, Elaine McArdle, Harry Moran, Paul Murphy (Treasurer), Richard Romano (Secretary), David Sayer

SUSTAINABLE SARATOGA POLICY ON MANAGED PARKING IN SARATOGA SPRINGS

Over the past 40 years, parking has been a “hot button” land use issue for downtown Saratoga Springs. The City has conducted 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.



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 high demand are not turning over.**

With a two-hour parking limit on Broadway and other downtown streets, parking spaces in the urban 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 cruise around downtown streets looking for available parking, causing visitor frustration. The lack of adequate signage and real-time information about parking availability contributes to traffic congestion.

- **Divided departmental responsibility reduces accountability and management efficiency.** Parking management is currently divided among four several 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 investment.

- **The cost of parking is not known and is borne by taxpayers.** Our current free parking program is actually far from free. Because individual users are not charged, all costs are paid by City residents through taxation. City taxes pay 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.

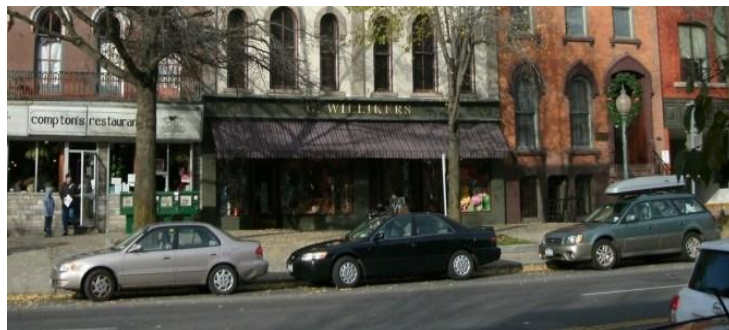
- **Available parking technologies have not been employed.** A number of new technologies could help improve parking efficiency and planning.
- **Parking is not managed as part of a comprehensive transportation program.** The promotion of alternative modes of transportation could reduce parking demand 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

Transportation planners have worked to develop a new concept of “managed parking”. Free-parking policies subsidize cars, degrade urban design, encourage sprawl, impede walkability, burden local economies, and raise housing and building costs.

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.

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



Sustainable Saratoga’s Recommendation for Managed Parking

- **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.

- **Sustainable Saratoga endorses the City Council’s August 2, 2016 adoption of the report of the Downtown Parking Task Force as policy.** Report recommendations include 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.

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

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

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