

Date: January 4, 2022
To: Corvallis Mayor and City Council
From: Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Land Use Action Team
Subject: Recommendations re. Parking through the Lens of Climate Change

Transportation is the greatest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon. Our dependence on the automobile is largely to blame since there is a direct relationship between greenhouse gas emissions and cars. The reality is that, as long as people continue to be car dependent, cars will need to park somewhere.

As a community, we need to look at an issue like parking as an opportunity to reduce vehicle miles traveled. The belief that people have a “right” to free parking anywhere they please encourages people to drive. If we are serious about finding solutions to the climate crisis, our community needs to be using the parking we have more effectively.

Streets are public spaces that are important for public safety, commerce, connectivity, and other modes of travel, and they may also provide short-term parking to augment these public purposes. However, transportation experts agree that increasing the amount of land dedicated to free parking in a community just encourages more people to drive and does not relieve congestion. Our perception of streets needs a “re-set” – a reframing in terms of the way we think about them. The City is to be applauded for its flexibility in allowing outdoor dining in spaces that were used strictly for car storage prior to the onset of the pandemic.

It is our hope that City Council will seriously consider many of the strategies presented by the City’s parking consultant, Rick Williams Consulting. These are strategies that are being incorporated throughout the country; many of these innovations will help our community reduce vehicle miles traveled and, thus, our greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, we invite you to read and consider the recommendations that we have outlined on the following pages. Several of the key points made in this document are based on recommendations of Rick Williams Consulting, whom the City of Corvallis has paid to provide you with guidance. We urge you to follow that guidance. The changes we recommend offer alternatives that will benefit drivers while reducing costs of parking spaces for everyone. This means that, in addition to reducing parking, our community needs to strengthen alternatives such as more convenient and efficient public transportation, ride-sharing, and safe corridors for walking and biking.

Finally, we believe that, by addressing parking as a means of reducing automobile use, the City of Corvallis will be able to achieve co-benefits such as increased affordable housing and increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists, both of which are high priorities for our community.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Part A: Recommendations

The Land Use Action Team of the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition has been studying parking in Corvallis for nearly three years. In collaboration with the League of Women Voters of Corvallis, we held two public meetings (October 2019 and February 2020), engaged in numerous discussions, and studied the seven white papers from Rick Williams Consulting and other related studies. Based on this experience, we urge City Council to consider the following recommendations to address parking in Corvallis.

1. **Identify goals for the City of Corvallis parking program.** OSU's Sustainable Transportation Strategy is guided by the five key values below that inform the university's selection of strategies and policies to reduce drive-alone trips to the Corvallis campus. These values are:

- Climate Action: Be bold in addressing the climate crisis.
- Good Neighborhood Relations: Help to reduce traffic and parking impacts in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Equity and Affordability: Ensure affordable access to education and employment for individuals at all income levels.
- Land Preservation: Preserve land for education, research and open space.
- Financial Stewardship: Use financial resources wisely to maximize return on investment and support our values.

These goals for OSU's program are listed simply as an example. We recommend that City Council identify and adopt its own goals to guide decision-making related to parking.

2. **Develop the overall parameters for parking management.**

- *Determine which department will be the lead* for overseeing parking management. Currently, this task is divided between Public Works, the Police Department, and the Municipal Court.
- *Use a data-based approach to parking management.* Update parking management to state-of-the-art practices and technology, including improved data acquisition, modernized equipment, and alternative designs for parking.
- *Implement the parking management improvements outlined in the consultant's report,* with an emphasis on using consistent, data-driven methodology to adapt controls and pricing throughout the city in response to local parking demand. The improvements will vary in different areas of the city if the data is different from one place to another.
- *Provide a strong public education program,* including an ambassadorial approach to parking enforcement. As explained in Rick Williams' White Paper #6, "Traditional enforcement programs often focus on citation productivity, whereas the ambassador model's aim is to provide information, aid, and general hospitality services." In other words, enforcement is helpful instead of punitive.
- *Prioritize parking for disabled community members;* 14% of Oregonians are disabled.

- *Collaborate with Oregon State University, Samaritan Health Services, and other large employers on their parking and transportation plans.*
3. **Use market principles to determine pricing, as part of the data-driven parking management system.**
 - *Move to a fee-based system that covers the total cost of parking management and aligns with the type of sustainable parking management outlined in the consultant’s report; i.e., price on-street parking spaces so that they maintain 85% occupancy.*
 - *Use fee structures that make parking more efficient and practical for drivers.*
 - *Apply market principles that encourage people to choose alternative transportation.*
 - *Use modern technology to implement parking fees in a user-friendly way. (NOTE: Coin only parking meters are not user-friendly and are not economical for the city.)*
 - *Recognize that different areas of the city require different parking management tools. Downtown, vicinity of OSU, Samaritan Hospital and the associated campus, various businesses, and selected areas of the city need to be considered separately.*
 4. **Revise parking requirements in building codes.**
 - *Reduce or eliminate parking minimums.* Parking minimums directly influence housing affordability. Requiring excessive parking in residential, commercial, and office areas, as well as at schools, reduces the amount of land that is available for other uses in Corvallis and also boosts the costs of development. For instance, requiring a developer to include a set number of off-street parking spaces for multi-unit housing can result in a difference of hundreds of dollars of rent per month for a tenant. Allowing developers to determine how much parking is needed for their development’s success may lower the cost of housing. NOTE: The Planning Commission’s recent approval of the Mixed Use project supports the reduction/elimination of parking minimums. These changes may also become a state requirement, as a result of the Oregon DLCDC’s Interagency Panel on Climate-Friendly and Equitable Communities rulemaking process.
 - *Establish parking controls in high-demand areas,* including residential, commercial, and office areas, as well as at schools. Such controls typically include pricing, time limits, and parking districts. Rick Williams’ White Paper #1 notes that Residential Parking Permit Districts in Corvallis are “the primary tool for managing on-street parking in residential areas”. Residents and employers/employees residing or located in parking districts are authorized to park longer than the posted time limit during hours of enforcement. Other controls may also be considered in such areas.
 5. **Discourage on-street “car storage” that privatizes public infrastructure. Use tools to encourage the use of existing off-street parking, to be preferred over on-street.**

- *Use public information to encourage a reframing of how the community thinks about streets.* On-street parking (i.e., storage) of private vehicles is currently perceived as a “right”, rather than use of a public space for a private purpose.
- *Implement enforcement, fees and/or time limits to discourage private car storage on public streets.* Drivers often underutilize private parking spaces (e.g., garages, driveways) in favor of the convenience of public on-street parking that can pose safety hazards for cyclists and moving vehicles, as well as impediments for services such as trash trucks and street sweepers.

Part B: Relationship to adopted City of Corvallis Plans

The recommendations outlined above support the **Imagine Corvallis 2040** goals listed below:

- Sustainable City
- Affordable Housing
- City Services and Financial Stability
- Community Safety
- Access to Healthy Lifestyles
- Vibrant Downtown
- Tourism and Visitor Attractions
- Alternative Transportation and Public Transit
- Well Planned and Maintained Infrastructure

In addition, our recommendations can help achieve the **Corvallis Transportation Systems Plan** goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled and support the **Corvallis Climate Action Plan’s** goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

APPENDIX

RESOURCES

The following resources were consulted in formulating our recommendations.

Resource #1: Rick Williams Consulting White Papers

Parking Districts

Corvallis' current Residential Parking Permit District Program has been around since 1982. There are currently three established districts, but no new districts have been established since 2010. Consultants concentrated on improvements to the program that make it clearer as regards to intent, purpose and communication within the code and to the public. While no new districts have been approved, some expansion and alteration of Districts B and C have occurred. Over time, more attention to rates and their relationship to desired outcomes should be made. Attention to administrative efficiencies and improved customer access to, and experience with, the program should be pursued.

Parking Rates and Fees

Overall, the parking fund system does provide an effective tool for implementing and tracking the success of parking management strategies and can be modified to allow for stronger financial health in the future. Among cities that charge for on-street parking, Corvallis has the lowest hourly rates (by at least half in most areas). Parking fees should be able to at least cover maintenance and replacement costs, which Corvallis' current fees do not. Very low parking rates can lead to unsustainable parking programs, depending on the costs to maintain and replace equipment.

Downtown Parking

Corvallis needs to establish a formal downtown parking management zone and adopt data-driven parking management. Evaluate whether free parking in the core downtown area is accomplishing the desired goals. Corvallis needs to adopt consistent rates and rules for areas of high parking demand and average duration of stay. The goal should be consistent rates and rules, and a modernized system that is of high quality in cooperation with OSU.

Parking Outside Downtown

Parking outside downtown needs to be coordinated with respect to strategies related to data-driven parking management, high-turnover stalls, loading zones, branding, striping, pay stations, and ADA parking, and standardized rates, rules, and parking measures. Adopt a base standard time limit and enforcement hours in all time-limited areas to simplify and standardize the system.

Current and New Technologies

Upgrade enforcement tools to facilitate pay-by-plate. Implement electronic permitting. New technologies can help with implementation. Install off-street counter systems, implement improvements and access to multi-modal transportation. Proactively engage with providers of shared mobility services.

Enforcement

Transition enforcement away from traditional police services. Think of parking enforcement more as an ambassadorial and educational service. Make the parking program financially self-sustaining. Create performance metrics and continually re-evaluate the program.

Eugene Permit System

The University of Oregon on-street permit system is complex. However, Eugene makes it fairly easy for users to apply for and renew permits online. For Corvallis, lessons learned from Eugene can provide a useful reference, particularly when considering new management tools such as online permitting, ambassadorial enforcement, variable permit rates, and selling commuter permits in residential areas.

Resource #2: Oregon State University Policy Analysis Laboratory Studies

OSU transportation choices: What drives us?

This report examines choices among employees, choices among students, and analyzes how major modes of travel compare in terms of convenience, saving time, and cost. For employees and students, convenience is most highly ranked.

Preliminary findings: single occupancy vehicles and parking permits

In Fall 2014, OSU implemented a new on-campus zonal parking permit system. The new, generally more expensive system changed parking habits, with implications for neighborhoods around campus, and for some travel choices by students and employees. The permit system shifted parking from parking lots on the northern edge of campus to Reser Stadium on the southwestern edge of campus. This study reports the impacts of work/study status, gender, living distance, and age on the decision of OSU employees and students purchasing a parking permit.

Opportunities for Planning and Experiments in Transit Connectivity

Can transportation connectivity compete with the car by being safer, faster, more efficient, and enjoyable? Better connectivity would help address problems such as parking adequacy, congestion, wasteful use of resources, air and water pollution, climate change, and provide new community development opportunities for the future. One promising area is with autonomous vehicles (AVs): Corvallis and OSU could collaborate on experiments with one of the many companies designing AV systems.

Corvallis parking: A proposal

Corvallis streets have increasing numbers of parked cars creating safety problems, reducing neighborhood livability, increasing pollution and greenhouse gasses, and degrading local aesthetics. OSU, LBCC, City, County, School District, apartments, businesses, medical facilities, churches, and others push parking demand onto Corvallis streets. On November 4, 2014, Corvallis residents rejected Measure 02-88, aimed at creating residential parking districts. An alternative parking proposal is offered for consideration in a revised approach.

Additional Resources

OSU Archived Studies

OSU completes an on-campus parking utilization study annually and a neighborhood parking study every five years. Neighborhood studies are available for 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2015. The latest study, completed in May 2016, has hourly parking utilization by block around the University.

OSU campus studies are an analysis of the parking conditions on campus and are completed annually during Fall Term, when enrollment and parking utilization are typically at their highest levels of the year. This enables calculation of the maximum campus parking utilization rate.

Kittelson and Associates 2015

Kittelson and Associates often work with OSU and the City on gathering parking data. They completed a comprehensive block by block study, done in cooperation with OSU and the City to determine neighborhood parking utilization rates around campus at all hours of the day and night.

Other Considerations

The Land Use Action Team has considered the following additional factors related to parking:

Corvallis Area Devoted to Cars

In 2015, Corvallis allocated 25% of its land to car dependence. The area devoted to each car is equal to the size of the average house.

Is Eight Parking Spaces Per Car Enough?

Although Corvallis has an abundance of parking spaces (eight spaces per car), people often complain that Corvallis has insufficient parking. In reality, parking problems are perceived when parking spaces are not available at the exact time and place desired by a driver.

Off-Street Parking Mandates and Parking Occupancy Rates

According to informal studies, mandated off-street parking is 25% to 50% greater than needed. Free on-street parking typically has a higher occupancy rate than off-street parking.

Parking near OSU

In neighborhoods near OSU, the long-term or temporary car storage needs of residents, commuters, commercial vehicles, shoppers, and others affect parking throughout the day and night.

Future Motorized Vehicles

The future of parking will be affected by many emerging transportation technologies. Autonomous vehicles, robots, and fixed-route autonomous transit can take many different forms that need to be guided by the community.

Parking Study Methodology

Most drivers prefer free parking near their destination. Getting drivers to consider mode choice and parking alternatives requires parking data and creative management. Parking is affected by the neighborhood context. Shopping, education, services, storage, and daily needs all affect parking utilization. Each neighborhood has its own set of special circumstances.