

## Goals:

- (1) **Increasing Property Values.** A successful parking management strategy should increase the value of land and property within the core downtown at greater rates than we see commercial property increasing in other parts of the city and region. We can measure this through the County Assessor's records.
- (2) **Increasing Sales Tax Receipts.** A successful parking management strategy should bring more patrons to the core downtown and result in more sales transactions. We can measure this through records with the Minnesota Department of Commerce.
- (3) **Increasing Human Count / Overall Activity.** A successful parking management strategy will result in more people being in the core downtown during prime hours. We can start counting overall activity (sidewalk count of people) on a regular basis to discern trends.

## Phase I: Make Better Use of What We Already Have

The first step in a parking strategy should be to take the assets we already have and make better use of them, setting ourselves up to gain information and feedback, and build momentum, before taking more significant steps. To achieve our goals, we should look to:

- Significantly raise rates on all city surface parking lots. We don't want to just cover costs, we also need to create a private market for alternatives to using prime public real estate for surface parking. With the city as the low-cost provider, we undermine other market participants and the overall market for providing parking stagnates (along with property values and investment opportunities).
- Deploy parking meters for all public parking in the core downtown.
  - Use digital meters. Potentially save up-front costs by contracting with a company to provide the meters and receive a payoff with revenues.
  - All revenue from the meters needs to be recycled back into the downtown, starting with parking enforcement. Excess should be used for downtown amenities as directed by a downtown-focused group (maybe downtown association, maybe Brainerd Community Action, ???). The goal is the meters should never be to fund general city operations but to improve the downtown.
  - We can provide some flexibility for key places – eg. Bridge of Harmony, where large equipment is often hauled in and out – for a 15 minute loading and unloading zone. These are things we can work out as meters are deployed. We want to keep businesses running smoothly but eliminate the local person (non-patron) who parks in the prime parking spot all day.
- Use the money from the higher parking fees and the meters to fund an enforcement program. Digital meters are easy to enforce – you are either paid up or not paid up – and four or five spot checks throughout the day will get us past the problems we now have with enforcement of non-metered, but time-limited, parking spaces.

- We can't blow it on the Washington Street reconstruction (the way we blew it on the South 6<sup>th</sup> Street reconstruction – no offense to anyone personally).
  - We need at least 4 blocks, and preferably 9 blocks, of good urban design – slow traffic, easy crossing for people on bike and foot, street trees, etc...
  - For the city, the primary goal of a Washington Street reconstruction has to be reconnecting North Brainerd to the core downtown. Nothing else – not moving traffic, not traffic speed, nothing – matters in comparison to the future of the city.
- Focus on improving walking/biking connections between neighborhoods, activity nodes, and the downtown. Use small interventions (cones, paint, trees, etc...) to make these improvements quickly and cheaply. The goal is to start expanding the number of people who find it easy to bike and walk.
  - 6<sup>th</sup> street between Gregory Park and the downtown
  - Crossing 8<sup>th</sup> Street between the railroad tracks and Maple Street
  - From County Government Center and BHS (both major parking lots and boom/bust dead-zone dynamics)
  - Note: We should get the Crossing Arts Alliance, the Franklin Arts Center, and the Shop involved in these efforts (and others). They have the creativity and energy to make this work, especially on a limited budget.
- Market the downtown with signage (and more) at activity nodes at key times. This marketing should focus on the “short walk” to the core downtown.
  - For example, have someone stand outside the county courthouse and hand out coupons for lunch specials between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM for a week.
  - Same idea here with getting artists and creative people involved.
- We need to signal our future intent to eliminate public surface parking in the core downtown. Give landlords, tenants, and surrounding property owners (with large surface lots) and time and motivation to find their own parking solutions. (I would suggest that the city should start repurposing city-owned surface parking lots in 2024.)
- We need to establish a baseline of metrics so we can measure progress over time. This should all be hyper-transparent (collected, shared, and reported publicly) and involve cooperation/feedback/coordination with downtown businesses, landlords, property owners, and tenants. We must help people get beyond their own gut impressions on parking – which are often passionate yet not representative of the whole – and get us all focusing on data and measurable results.
  - Neighborhood by neighborhood tracking of property values with a baseline shift-share analysis to Baxter, Pequot Lakes, Crosby, and Crow Wing County. This will answer the question: How are we doing in relation to our peers in the region?
  - Neighborhood by neighborhood sales tax information with as much detail as we can legally publish (for business protection reasons, the state has restrictions on how fine-grained the detail we share is).
  - Voluntary reporting of customer counts from downtown businesses.
  - Routine traffic counts of pedestrians and bikes in key areas and corridors, just like we do for automobiles.
  - Regular snapshots/counts of parking demand as measured by available spots throughout city properties.

- We need to start the process for changing on-street parking along 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. This will involve coordination with Mn/DOT and (I think) Crow Wing County. This won't be an easy process, but we can assert our priorities in a way that meets the objectives of the state and the county (especially as their objectives are changing to more align with ours).
  - 8<sup>th</sup> Street should not have as many lanes as it does, nor should the lanes be so wide. We can do angled parking on 8<sup>th</sup> and gain a lot of parking spots adjacent to downtown while making the street friendlier to cross.
  - 6<sup>th</sup> Street should have wider sidewalks, street trees, and no middle turning lane, but that is an opportunity we missed on (I bring it up again because we can't miss this opportunity on Washington Street). The striping in the core downtown can be changed to provide on street parking and easier crossing for people on foot.
- We do control Laurel Street, and we should go back and restripe to eliminate the unnecessary turn lanes between the county complex and the downtown, restoring the parking spots that used to be there. This will also help with our efforts to improve the biking and walking within the core downtown.
- Make changes to the zoning code to reinforce this vision.
  - No new surface parking in the core downtown.
  - Require new residential units in the core downtown to identify non-public parking spots available to tenants within 4 blocks of their new building.
  - Eliminate surface parking requirements in residential areas.
  - Ban surface parking of more than 6 stalls throughout all residential neighborhoods.
  - Create simple design standards for the locations of parking and buildings in, or adjacent to, residential areas to ensure that parking is behind structures and not between the building and the street.

## Phase II: Start Creating Alternatives to Surface Parking in the Core Downtown

The second step is to really improve ways for people to get to and experience the downtown without needing to park in the core downtown. The idea is to build demand and capacity for phasing out surface parking entirely so we can have more businesses, jobs, tax base, and overall economic growth.

- Continue to raise rates on surface parking lots. We don't want the city to be the low cost alternative – we want other market participants to be that – and we want most of the activity to be in the on-street parking spaces. In the market we are establishing for parking, public surface lots should be the premium cost alternative.
- Refine our street meter strategy so that we price the on-street parking correctly. Keep the prices low enough to provide an attractive alternative yet high enough to have turnover and always have one or two available spaces on each block.
- Continue to fund enforcement at levels necessary to keep the meter approach functioning. Continue to dedicate excess funds to improving the amenities of the downtown, as directed by stakeholders.
- Make changes to the city transit system to provide a regular loop during peak periods, bringing people from the city's core neighborhoods to the downtown and from the downtown to area employment centers.

- For periods of prime parking demand, copy the approach used by Lockport (IL) and provide a valet parking service that would allow people to conveniently come downtown yet have their car parked outside of the core downtown. Lockport provides this service for free and it has been really successful, especially when paired with a paid-parking strategy for surface lots and on-street parking.
- Establish a schedule for using public surface parking lots for alternative uses, such as food trucks, music, art, and other pop-up commercial venues. Over time, allow some of these temporary uses to become more permanent by copying the storage shed strategy used in Muskegon (MI).
- Start making the small interventions done in Phase I into more permanent and substantial improvements to walking, biking, and marketing. Focus on those that have been the most successful and build out from there.
  - For example, if small changes to 8<sup>th</sup> Street (such as a pedestrian board or a set of cones in the middle of the street) have resulted in an increase in people walking across the street, then look at installing a concrete median in this area that would provide the same benefit but in a more permanent and effective way.
- Continue to monitor and report on key metrics for success in the downtown. Use this data to adjust our approach.
- Finish the process of adding more on-street parking to 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Street through the core downtown.
- Put in place zoning changes that provide for the thickening up of core residential neighborhoods, expanding the pool of people connected to the downtown and created a positive feedback loop (more people = more demand for downtown businesses, more downtown businesses = better quality of life, better quality of life = more people wanting to live in Brainerd).

### Phase III: Phase Out Surface Parking in Prime Locations

The third step will be to repurpose public surface lots into structures that provide more businesses, jobs, and housing. We should continue to expand incrementally on all the strategies in the first two phases, ultimately adding a strategy to:

- Solicit proposals for development of publicly owned land in the core downtown. Create a private/public partnership (not merely a low-bidder scenario) to develop complementary development plans for city-owned surface lots.