

Garage & Parking Management Plan Q&A

Why is the municipality concerned with addressing the parking issue?

■ The supply of parking is not keeping pace with demand; the demand for parking limits reuse of existing underutilized spaces, including the former mill sites and Main Street negatively affecting existing, long standing businesses and neighborhoods.

■ Additional mill site redevelopment include the Lincoln Street Mill, the Pepperell Mills, North Dam Mills, River Dam Mills, the Saco-Lowell Mill and 3 Lincoln Street (the MERC site).

■ Redevelopment of Main Street and adjoining streets is also impacted by competition for available parking by area employees and consumers. Inadequate parking is identified as a reason for vacancies on both lower and upper floors.

■ Parking supply is critical to broadening the tax base and taking advantage of present economic conditions. Biddeford's primary growth/redevelopment area is the downtown. Biddeford's story and image are of special interest to the southern Maine real estate community. A commitment to downtown parking and infrastructure investment will maintain that present and future investment interest.

Is there any evidence to justify infrastructure investment in the downtown at this time?

■ A comparison of valuation change within the community indicates that MSR3 (the mill district) has increased, with redevelopment, by 168% in the last ten years. The value of MSR1s 1, 2 & 3 (including the mill and surrounding downtown districts) increased 11% over that same period. At the same time, all commercial real estate in the city increased only 14%, and all residential increased just 3%. As this growth has occurred, parking has become increasingly scarce.

■ It is a fact that there is more than 800,000 – 1,000,000 square feet of available space in the mill district, 30% of Main Street is vacant, and a completely undeveloped commercial property at 3 Lincoln Street (the former Maine Energy property) exists. These properties represent future tax revenue potential. Additional parking would maximize downtown redevelopment, while the growth trends in the rest of the community slow.

So what are the action options and associated consequences?

■ Take No Action. The consequences of no action, which assumes that parking is not a problem, includes but is not limited to:

1. Leaving the future of the downtown to forces outside of the City's control.
2. Potentially limiting the rate and extent of growth in the community.
3. Missing an opportunity to maximize non-residential tax revenue.
4. With no or limited parking, rehab and saving valuable mill and Main Street space will be difficult, providing homes for people and businesses will be stressed, and our important mill heritage could be lost.

■ Wait until some future point in time to take action. This option recognizes the issue but makes a conscious decision to not act in anticipation of some future trigger. The potential consequences of this approach are similar to a homeowner waiting to buy oil or waiting to refinance in the hopes that a better opportunity or price might present itself.

1. On the upside, there is always the potential for some development opportunity that will solve problems and bring jobs, customers, and tax revenue to the city.
2. On the downside, the lead-time needed for construction of a parking structure to serve parking needs may not coincide with peak market demand, squandering timely development interest.
3. Waiting on a parking structure limits the ability of the City to shape and influence downtown redevelopment, leaving that control to others.

■ Take action now. This option recognizes growth potential, concludes that positive indicators exist, and that immediate and long-term issues are addressed by providing parking. Based on professional forecasts (e.g. MEREDA Annual Forecasting Conference; January, 2018), the Saco-Biddeford market is growing and ripe for redevelopment. Investors, fully aware of that potential, will have certainty that future parking will be available and will choose to invest here. Without action, growth slows or stagnates and the tax revenue growth now building steam will not be realized for several more years.

Who pays for a parking structure?

■ The parking structure will not be paid for with General Fund tax dollars; that is the point of the parking management program. Parking is not presently free: under the current structure, taxpayers pay for all of the parking on public streets and in public lots, whether used by visitors or non-

resident employees. This includes the cost of paving, striping, signage, snow removal, and ongoing maintenance. The parking management system will shift the cost of parking to users, not the resident taxpayer. This includes:

1. No Meters on Main Street.
 2. Existing residential parking on streets will remain free.
 3. Based on input, paid parking during the day will change to free parking in the evening.
 4. Garage and surface parking will provide predictable snow emergency parking options during the BAN periods.
 5. Utilizing TIF dollars created by Mill district redevelopment will supplement parking revenues to avoid use of general fund dollars.
- ☐ Time limited, free parking will be part of the program on Main Street (and limited side streets) to manage flow, availability, and access to all consumers of downtown goods and services.

Do the recent RFPs for kiosks and handheld enforcement units mean that Main Street will be pay to park?

☐ No, or rather, absolutely not! Despite repeated public statements about parking meters, the citizen referendum approved last year is binding. Neither staff nor the City Council have any plans to install parking meters or otherwise circumvent the referendum. Enforcement, however, will be enhanced.

How has the Community managed the risk associated with parking management investments including paying for a parking structure?

☐ There is risk involved in every decision. Taxpayer risk has been mitigated through the following:

1. The City Council, through a competitive bid process, engaged a professional design team

experienced in municipal garage development to evaluate siting options and design.

2. When the City Council authorized design of the garage in 2017, it was clear that there would be a number of decision points built into the design review process. If during the process factors change, the council has the ability to halt the project at any critical decision point.

3. Staff created a very conservative financial model, with a variety of variables, as proof of concept to determine the financial feasibility of paying for the garage without impacting property taxes. In that analysis, conservative revenue streams have been identified and demonstrate that parking structure costs will be covered. Future revenue streams are likely higher than projected.

4. The City Council authorized release of an RFP for a so-called 3rd party consultant to provide professional-level review of the financial model and additional review as needed for design-phase elements to provide a check and balance assessment.

5. It should be recognized that parking issues are not a recent development. The topic has been discussed for many years. A sample of prior work calling for additional parking includes:

- Downtown Action Plan, 1978
- Comprehensive Plan, 1999
- Biddeford Master Plan, 2009
- Downtown Parking Study, 2012
- 3 Lincoln Street (MERC Site) Redevelopment, Market and Feasibility Study, 2015, Camoin Associates
- Biddeford Garage Site Study Presentation, 2017
- Staff Reports, 2018

**Parking Ban Hotline
(207) 571-0616**

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Downtown Parking Map.**

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