



Columbia, Missouri

Parking Audit

Report and Suggested Next Steps

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

September 22 and 23, 2015

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Background

The City of Columbia, Missouri, applied to Smart Growth America (SGA) for a parking audit workshop in order to “further current city efforts to reduce public demand for subsidized downtown parking, and to develop a fairer transportation system that benefits both car and non-car owners.” Using a tool provided by SGA and guidance from the project consultant, City staff and volunteers conducted a parking audit to evaluate current parking usage and availability in several neighborhoods in, and adjacent to, downtown. After reviewing the results with City staff, the project consultant traveled to Columbia to conduct the parking audit workshop on September 22 and 23rd, 2015.

The parking audit workshop was designed as an opportunity to further discussions on how the City might most effectively partner with other entities to manage parking to achieve community revitalization goals. Following an evening presentation open to the public, the project consultant conducted a day-long stakeholder workshop for elected officials, city staff, downtown business owners and residents, civic association leadership and neighborhood representatives, and a leader of the University of Missouri facilities team. The workshop provided a neutral setting where an impartial parking expert could evaluate local policies and practices and offer advice based on the state of the practice, with an emphasis on what works well and what should be avoided.

The intent of the workshop was neither for SGA to create a plan nor bind the community to any particular course of action, but rather to facilitate a discussion within the community about how

best to manage parking in the Downtown Columbia area. The purpose of this memo is to summarize SGA recommendations to support further discussion and decisions by Columbians to facilitate improved parking management.

1. Key issues addressed during the workshop

This workshop was focused on the Downtown Columbia area, including surrounding neighborhoods and taking into account the adjacent campus of the University of Missouri and the nearby campuses of Stephens College and Columbia College. Columbia is a city with a population of about 120,000 that holds the county seat of Boone County and is the only city in the Columbia Metropolitan Area.

Downtown Columbia is a thriving mixed-use downtown with healthy retail storefronts, destination restaurants, office buildings and a significant amount of multi-family residential space associated with student condo and apartment buildings. The presence of residential buildings has been a boon to the economic vitality in downtown, but also a source of growing, long-term (overnight/multi-day) parking demand.

The City has been interested in smart growth solutions and has had a number of smart growth successes. However, with a rapidly growing student and general population, and a culture of car dependency, demand for parking downtown and in adjacent neighborhoods has outpaced available supply. The city, university and community leaders realized that smart growth principles are a necessary part of any parking solution, but the community as a whole, as well as city staff, lacked understanding of how these principles could be applied to alleviate the parking predicament. As a result, public parking discussions devolve into struggles over public parking space, and city staff has not had an appropriate tool kit with which alleviate these community conflicts.

The parking audit workshop was intended to provide two opportunities for the city. First, it would provide a platform with which to bring diverse public parking stakeholders to the table. City leaders and staff, the University of Missouri, downtown groups and businesses, local not-for-profits and neighborhood associations were committed to participate in the workshop and to partner to implement tools learned from the session. Second, the workshop would provide new tools for city staff and the community to apply towards the resolution of their parking challenges.

Moreover, the workshop was intended to further city efforts to reduce public demand for subsidized downtown parking and to develop a more equitable transportation system that benefits all travelers. The City intends to use the knowledge gained from the workshop to integrate parking solutions into its ongoing development code update, improve the city's evolving residential parking permit program, create a downtown employee parking/transit program and a Parking Advisory Commission, and improve the overall usefulness of, and participation in, the public transit system.

Specific topics addressed at the public forum and stakeholder workshop included:

- Results of the parking audit conducted by the City using tools provided by SGA;
- Overall trends in travel demand in the US and in Missouri;
- Implications of technological advances for future parking demand;
- Basic principles of modern, strategic parking management;
- Strategic parking management techniques and practices, including:
- Shifting transportation mode share away from single occupant vehicles;
- Shared parking and joint parking and unbundling residential parking ownership;
- Fee-in-lieu payments;
- Grandfathering of storefront parking arrangements;
- Enforcement approaches and technologies;
- Timing of new parking supply;
- Parking and urban design;
- Permit parking;
- Time limits;
- Parking pricing; and,
- Parking districts and integrated parking management systems.

2. Target policies/ideas/strategies discussed during the workshops

Discussion at the well-attended evening public forum set the stage for more specific analysis and debate at the stakeholder workshop the next morning. The workshop culminated in the development of consensus goals and action items, derived from the work of break-out teams of local stakeholders, facilitated by SGA and city staff.

Stakeholder discussions centered around several key issues:

- The need for accurate, real-time metrics about parking demand and supply;
- How to integrate the programs and policies of the City and UM administration;
- How to protect and grow downtown businesses and the downtown economy;
- How to create a walkable downtown and walkable neighborhoods;
- How to increase transit service levels and transit ridership;
- How to protect residential neighborhoods from overflow university parking;
- How to implement a city-wide approach to residential parking permit districts;
- How to use leading edge technologies to improve parking management; and,
- How to equitably distribute the costs of providing parking to the end users.

Consensus goals developed by workshop attendees included:

1. People who live in neighborhoods are able to safely park near their homes.
2. Downtown parking is managed in a way that helps downtown grow and thrive.
3. Programs of the City and University affecting downtown are well integrated.

4. Long-term storage of cars (overnight and multi-day parking) does not impact business and residential short term parking needs.

3. Actions to address policies/strategies

The stakeholders developed the following list of consensus priority actions:

a. Form a city-wide parking commission. (Lead: shared by City staff and City Council)

This commission would initially focus on downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, but would later broaden its mission to include all areas of the city. The Columbia City Council has called for the formation of a Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce. Due to a current departmental re-organization process, the city plans to hold off on the formation of the Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce until September of 2016.

b. Use mode share and public transportation to reduce downtown parking demand. (Lead: Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce)

A consultant will complete a new transit plan for the local transit system (COMO Connect) in the coming months (procurement is almost complete). Use that project to develop metrics for mode shift away from driving and establish city-wide mode share objectives to ensure an integrated approach to parking and transportation. Mode share objectives are not included in the Transit Service Analysis and Planning Assistance Project contract with Olsson Associates that has already been approved by council. However, there is potential to include mode share objectives in any plan that is developed after the transit study is completed in early 2017. One of the Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce objectives will be to analyze and potentially include mode share objectives in the transit plan.

c. Public information, marketing and education. (Lead: Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce)

Develop a transportation demand management (TDM) program similar to GO Boulder, as a collaboration between the City and University, which provides information and educational resources on travel choices, including walking, bicycling, transit and driving. Develop outreach to ensure that people are aware of multimodal opportunities and have access to transit passes and other resources to encourage a shift in travel away from single occupant vehicles. Develop an employer TDM outreach to work with employers in Columbia (including the university and colleges) to help employees benefit from commute options and choices. With the exception of university and college partnerships, the City of Columbia currently has a number of outreach programs (see below) similar to those under the umbrella of GO Boulder. Barring council direction to alter current activities, staff plans to continue these programs:

COMO Connect, the City's Public Transit System, has a number of programs aimed at increasing awareness of, and access to, transit opportunities. Children under 5 years of age ride free, and students 5-18 years of age can ride free by displaying a valid student ID. The disabled, elderly (ages 65+ years), Medicare and Medicaid recipients, and qualified low income residents can apply

for half fare eligibility through the COMO Connect website. In addition, downtown employees qualify for half-price bus fares, priced at \$25 a month. Finally, all persons, including city employees, who have purchased a parking permit in an unmetered off-street parking facility qualify for a free, annual unlimited use bus pass. These programs are currently promoted through the COMO Connect and the downtown Community Improvement District (CID) websites.

Since 2008, the city's Get About Education and Outreach programs, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, has provided a growing number of programs designed to encourage and educate our community about the benefits of healthy transportation. Bicycle safety and skills classes follow the curriculum of the League of American Bicyclists, a national advocacy organization. Classes are offered free of charge and include City Cycling, Bike Buddy, bicycle maintenance and weather related cycling seminars. Encouragement programs include a wide variety of theme rides introducing cyclists of all skill levels to bicycle friendly routes. Ride participants are introduced to streets with bike lanes or pedways and those with low traffic volume and connectivity to the Columbia trails system. GetAbout staff participates in numerous outreach opportunities throughout the year at community-wide events, campus activities and workplace seminars. Collateral materials include bike maps, trail guides and bicycle/pedestrian safety pamphlets. GetAbout partners with the CID and various City departments (Transit, Health and Columbia Police Department) to offer awareness activities including Bike, Walk and Wheel Week, Trails Day and Lighten up Columbia (bike light giveaway program). Funding for GetAbout Columbia is provided by the Federal Highway Administration's Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program.

On August 17th, 2015, the city's parking utility started a pilot project offering 200 discounted permits to downtown business employees, and others with long-term parking needs, to park at 10-hour meters away from prime parking spaces in the city's central core. Permits are currently \$35 a month and are processed by Parkmobile, Inc. To date, 38 permits have been sold.

As for a larger employer TDM approach, any effective one would need to be completed by MU and University Hospital and focus not only on employees but students as well. The Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce will explore this option further, as it will include University of Missouri representation. It will also seek ways to potentially strengthen and promote the city's current TDM programs.

d. Prepare a downtown access and circulation plan. (Lead: Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce)

Develop a downtown access and circulation plan to address parking and transportation in downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. The ACP will result in strategies for improving the operations of each mode – pedestrian, bicycle, transit and personal vehicle – and will establish metrics to support ongoing monitoring and reporting of progress toward plan implementation. Data collection in support of performance metrics will be an early part of plan development. The project will evaluate leading edge technological solutions and tools for parking, transit and traffic management. The plan will address long-term vehicle storage needs (overnight/multi-day parking) to free up short-term parking for access to downtown businesses. The project will be coordinated

with the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission and the new Parking Commission (see a above) to ensure broad awareness of the emerging plan and strong community buy-in and support for implementation.

Staff believes that the existing public street system and circulation pattern is adequate to serve the downtown area. Besides the on-street and public garage vehicular parking spaces that are available, other projects have been done and/or are pending that will potentially improve downtown access for a variety of modes.

The GetAbout program has implemented hundreds of additional bicycle racks/bicycle parking spaces in the downtown area, and provided funding for sidewalk repairs and improvements, which has been a major upgrade to non-motorized mode access. Other sidewalk projects are continually in process.

The pending Transit Master Plan to be done for COMO Connect will provide new research to maximize the efficiency of COMO Connect's downtown access, and potentially increase ridership and result in a mode shift away from private motor vehicles.

The parking utility has already begun to attend to downtown's long term parking needs through permit price structures based on traveler intent (i.e. hourly visitor, downtown employee, downtown resident, etc.) and prices will continue to be adjusted accordingly as the city grows.

However, the City Council would like the Parking and Traffic Management Taskforce to examine the possibility of a downtown access and circulation plan. The city cannot offer a firm commitment to such a plan until the taskforce has gathered more information.

4. Timeframe for accomplishing actions

Within 3 months following workshop

- Provide City Council with a briefing on outcomes from the parking audit and workshop and this action plan (Completed)

September, 2016

- Implement new Parking Commission and/or Taskforce

Winter and Spring 2017

- Probable initiation of development of transit plan for COMO Connect
- Likely inclusion of mode share analysis and objectives in plan development

Spring 2017

- Prospective inclusion of new TDM outreach program in 2018 budget development for consideration by City Council

- Potential inclusion of new downtown access and circulation plan in 2018 budget development for consideration by City Council

Fall 2017

- Potential initiation of development of new TDM outreach program
- Potential initiation of development of new downtown access and circulation plan

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