

Downtown Brunswick Parking Study

Prepared for:

**The Downtown Brunswick
Parking Committee**

and

**The Town of Brunswick and
The Brunswick Intown Group**

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I. INTRODUCTION

The adequacy of parking in Downtown to serve customers, employees, and other Downtown users has been the subject of ongoing discussion and debate. It remains a key issue facing Downtown businesses, residents, and property owners as well as the Town of Brunswick and people who use Downtown.

The Town's Comprehensive Plan contains a number of recommendations related to parking in Downtown including:

- § Improve Downtown parking
- § Make parking more efficient to make Downtown a "more interesting and inviting place to walk"
- § Provide clear directional signs to all municipal parking lots
- § Establish an education program to promote the use of municipal parking lots.
- § Use the School Department lot on Union Street and the Hawthorne School for parking for Downtown uses
- § Provide an up-to-date map of Downtown parking
- § Acquire land adjacent to the municipal parking lot in order to expand the parking area.

The Downtown Master Development Plan prepared in 1997 also addresses the issue of parking in Downtown Brunswick. The Downtown Plan views parking as a key component in the success of Downtown. It includes the following as part of the vision for Downtown:

"Downtown Parking. Parking in strategic locations is necessary to facilitate pedestrian access to the Downtown. Parking lots need to be placed at the best appropriate locations, primarily at both ends and in the center of the Downtown, to create a circular pedestrian traffic flow. Access and egress to parking facilities must be safe and inviting for optimum utilization. However, parking in the Downtown should not be developed to the detriment of Downtown residents."

The Downtown Plan proposed a number of improvements related to parking including:

- § Installing directional signs for off-street parking areas
- § Developing a two-way connection from the Cumberland Street municipal parking lot to Pleasant Street
- § Acquiring and developing of a portion of the Maine Street Station site for public parking

§ Working with the owners of Fort Andross to develop additional parking inside the building.

§ Working with MeDOT to relocate the commuter parking lot on Cabot Street and reconfiguring the surface parking in this area.

The plan also discussed developing the air rights over Route One and the possible use of the “Hair Academy” lot as an extension of the municipal parking lot off Cumberland Street.

At the same time, the Plan reached the conclusion that “there is the potential to satisfy near-term projected needs. Consequently, a Downtown parking garage was not considered necessary at this time.” The Plan notes that a parking garage could be inappropriate from a visual perspective in most Downtown locations.

In spite of this previous attention, the issue of parking and its adequacy to support an economically vibrant and growing Downtown remains an unresolved question. To try to resolve this question, the Town, in conjunction with the Brunswick Intown Group, undertook a detailed study of the current parking situation in Downtown. This study inventoried the existing supply of parking in Downtown and the current usage of Downtown buildings and the available parking. It surveyed property owners, business owners, and customers about the parking situation. It analyzed the adequacy of parking in Downtown to meet the needs of three groups:

- S customers and other users of Downtown
- S employees of Downtown businesses
- S Downtown residents

The study was directed by the Downtown Parking Committee consisting of municipal representatives and representatives of the Downtown property owners and businesses. The following report summarizes the findings of the parking study and outlines the Parking Committee’s recommendations to improve parking in Downtown Brunswick.

II. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The parking study collected and analyzed data about:

- The current occupied building space in Downtown Brunswick
- The current supply of on-street and off-street parking
- The utilization of existing parking
- The opinions of Downtown property owners, businesses, and customers about the parking situation
- The demand for parking on a block-by-block basis
- The adequacy of parking to serve customers, employees, and residents

This section provides an overview of the key findings of the inventory and analysis process and sets forth conclusions about the parking situation in Downtown based upon that information.

Detailed results of the various data collection and analysis activities are contained in the technical appendices at the conclusion of the report.

A. THE DOWNTOWN STUDY AREA

The Downtown parking study focused on the area bounded by the Androscoggin River on the north, the east side of Federal Street on the east, Bath Road and Noble Street on the south, and the west side of Union Street on the west.

For the purposes of data collection and analysis, the study area was divided into blocks. The blocks and their designation are shown on Figure II-1. Information is provided on the block basis in the technical appendices.

The Downtown study area functions as three distinct sub-areas from a parking and economic perspective. In the analysis, the findings and conclusions are presented in terms of these three subareas:

- North of Route 1 including Fort Andross
- The core of Downtown from Route 1 south to Pleasant and School Streets
- The area south of Pleasant and School Streets.

B. LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

The data collection phase of the parking study was designed to develop a baseline understanding of the current parking situation. This baseline was intended to represent a “normal” condition that is experienced in Downtown Brunswick over the course of most of a year. The data does not, therefore, reflect peak parking demand or peak utilization of parking in Downtown. Rather, it reflects normal or typical parking conditions.

There are a number of special parking issues that are not accounted for in the data:

1. During the summer season, a number of “hot dog vendors” set up and operate on the Mall. Customers of these businesses typically park along Maine Street adjacent to the Mall. The data collection occurred when these vendors were not present.
2. During the summer, the Mall is used for a Farmer’s Market on Tuesday’s and Friday’s. This results in a surge in parking demand from both vendors and customers. The data was collected when the Farmer’s Market was not in operation.
3. Special events at Bowdoin College can significantly increase traffic and parking demand in Downtown. The data collection was scheduled when no significant activities were occurring at Bowdoin.
4. The Maine State Music Theater operates on the Bowdoin Campus with nightly performances and a number of afternoon matinees throughout much of the summer. This parking demand is not included in the analysis and the data on parking utilization was collected when the theater was not operating.

C. EXISTING PARKING SUPPLY

There are approximately 4,200 parking spaces in the Downtown Study Area. Of this supply, approximately three quarters (3,192) are private while about one quarter (1,028) are publically provided. Most of the public parking is located on street (735 spaces) while almost 300 spaces are located in municipal parking lots. The public parking is located primarily in the core of Downtown (Route 1 to Pleasant/School Streets) and the area south of Pleasant Street.

Within the core of Downtown there are 563 public parking spaces of which about 60% are on-street and 40% are in the municipal lots. Over three quarters of the on-street parking spaces are limited to two hour occupancy while the off-street spaces in the municipal lots are split pretty evenly between time limited two hour spaces and unrestricted spaces.

A complete inventory of the parking supply in Downtown Brunswick is contained in Appendix

B.

D. UTILIZATION OF THE EXISTING PARKING SUPPLY

The overall utilization rate of the public parking and parking in the principal private lots ranges between 50% and 55% but varies widely throughout the Downtown Study Area. In some areas, the parking is virtually fully utilized while in other areas it receives very limited use.

Areas with high utilization include:

1. Unrestricted or all day public parking in the Town Lot off Bank Street and the Fire Station Lot.
2. Unrestricted or all day on-street parking in the Core Area that is within reasonably close proximity (<500 feet) to Maine Street.
3. The private long term parking in the Fort Andross Fishway lot
4. The public unrestricted parking in the Cabot Street municipal lot.
5. The private, long term, employee parking associated with Fort Andross on the south side of Cabot Street.
6. The private customer parking in the Tontine Mall lot and the associated two hour on-street public parking on School Street.
7. The all day parking in the Library Satellite Lot and near the First Parish Church.
8. The parking on Pleasant Street near the Post Office; and
9. The on-street, 2 hour parking along Maine Street in the core of Downtown at various times of the day.

While most underutilized parking is located on the periphery of the study area, there are a few key parking areas that are underutilized including:

1. The reserved or customer parking areas at Fort Andross, and
2. The Gardiner Savings Bank Lot on Maine Street.

Utilization of the two-hour parking in the Fire Station Lot and the Town Lot off Bank Street varies throughout the day, but the short term parking in both lots is typically not fully utilized.

A detailed analysis of the utilization of Downtown parking can be found in Appendix C.

E. PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADEQUACY OF DOWNTOWN PARKING

The surveys of Downtown property owners, Downtown business owners/managers, and Downtown users provide an understanding of how these three groups perceive the adequacy of parking in Downtown Brunswick. Detailed summaries of the three surveys are contained in Appendix D, E, and F.

1. *Property Owners*

Downtown property owners, in general, rate the adequacy of the Downtown parking supply as below average and parking services (safety, maintenance, enforcement, etc.) as above average. Property owners in the Core area rated the adequacy of parking lower than other property owners. Employee parking was identified as a significant issue by people who own buildings housing restaurants, entertainment uses, and business offices. Concerns about customer parking were identified by owners of buildings with restaurants and entertainment uses as well as buildings with community or service uses.

A significant group of property owners with restaurant space, business office space, and apartments reported problems leasing that space due to the parking situation but only two respondents report not using space due to inadequate parking.

2. *Business Owners and Managers*

Business Owners who participated in the survey reported a high level of dependence on public on-street parking to meet their parking needs. Reliance on the public parking lots is lower but is significant for certain types of businesses including business offices, community uses and entertainment.

Business owners generally rated the adequacy of overall customer parking and overall employee parking as less than adequate. This was especially true of businesses located in the core of Downtown and north of Route One.

3. *Downtown Customers and Users*

Participants in the customer intercept survey expressed somewhat conflicting views about parking in Downtown. The vast majority of respondents reported little difficulty in finding parking on the day they were interviewed. In addition, most of the respondents felt the parking was very convenient to their destination. However, about 30% of customers and 40% of Downtown employees had a negative view of the overall parking situation.

The parking situation may adversely impact people's use of Downtown. Thirty percent of respondents reported that they come Downtown but sometimes do not stop because they cannot find suitable parking, while over 20% report they do not come Downtown sometimes because they think they will not be able to find a parking space.

F. CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the findings of the inventory and analysis phase of the study, the following

conclusions can be drawn about the parking situation in Downtown Brunswick. It must be remembered that these conclusions relate to the typical or normal parking situation and do not reflect the peak parking situation related to summer use including the Farmer's Market and Maine State Music Theater.

1. While the private sector provides approximately three quarters of the parking in Downtown, the public parking is essential to the health of Downtown. This is especially true within the Core Area from Route One south to Pleasant and School Streets where many businesses rely on on-street parking and parking in the municipal lots for both their customers and employees.
2. Management of the public parking supply is generally well done and tries to balance the needs of businesses and Downtown residents.
3. Awareness of the existing supply of public and customer parking is reasonably good but efforts to make customers and employees aware of available parking options needs to be continued.
4. While the overall supply of parking appears to be adequate to meet current parking demand when Downtown Brunswick is considered as a whole, there are a number of areas within Downtown where the parking supply is inadequate to meet current demand.
5. Customer parking (or the two hour parking) appears to be generally adequate to meet current demand throughout most of Downtown but there are a couple of key problem areas:
 - a. Maine Street from Pleasant Street north to Gilman/Mason Streets
 - b. The Tontine Mall/School Street area
6. There are typically some vacant two hour parking spaces in the Town Lot between Center and Bank Streets, in the Mill Street Lot, and in the Fire Station Lot.
7. Continued economic revitalization of the Downtown area and/or further development may be limited by the lack of convenient, well located customer parking to meet the increased demand.
8. Long term parking, including employee parking, appears to be less than adequate in much of Downtown north of Pleasant Street. Much of the available unrestricted or all day parking in municipal parking lots is fully utilized including

the Town Lot, Town Hall Lot, Fire Station Lot, and Cabot Street Lot. The unrestricted parking in the Library Satellite Lot is fully utilized in the morning.

9. In addition, most of the close-in, unrestricted, on-street parking including Cabot Street, Gilman Ave., and Pleasant Street is reasonably fully utilized at some periods during the day.
10. There is some evidence that long term parkers are using two hour spaces and moving their vehicles over the course of the day.
11. Based upon the property owner and business owner surveys, the current parking situation appears to be a deterrent to business location in the Downtown and to the development of additional commercial space in the Downtown area.
12. The lack of adequate parking is a significant deterrent to the full reuse of Fort Andross and will limit the ability to attract additional tenants that have any significant demand for customer and/or employee parking.
13. Based upon the customer intercept survey, the current parking situation appears to be a deterrent for some consumers using Downtown businesses.
14. There appears to be limited support for paid parking in Downtown.

Since the parking study measured the normal or typical parking situation in Downtown, it is reasonable to conclude that the study conclusions underestimate the seriousness of the peak parking situation especially in those areas where available parking is fully utilized under “normal conditions” and in those areas that are impacted by seasonal parking demands created by uses on the Mall (vendors and Farmer’s Market) and the Maine State Music Theater.

III. DOWNTOWN PARKING OBJECTIVES

The recommendations for parking improvements in Downtown Brunswick are based upon the following objectives:

- T Assure that Downtown customers and users are aware of and can easily locate the available public parking and clearly understand where and for how long public parking is permitted.

- T Assure that there is adequate parking for customers of Downtown businesses that is conveniently located

- T Maximize the availability of existing two hour parking for customer use by minimizing the use of short term parking by employees and other long term visitors to the Downtown

- T Expand the supply of short term customer parking in the future as demand warrants

- T Provide adequate and safe long term parking for Downtown employees without pushing long term parking into residential neighborhoods

- T Expand the supply of well located employee parking and encourage its use

- T Assure that the enforcement of the Town's parking regulations is firm but that it does not drive customers from the Downtown

- T Develop a long term funding mechanism for municipal parking improvements

- T Work with property owners to expand the parking supply to allow full utilization of existing building space or for the creation of new or expanded space

These objectives are intended to guide both private and public activities designed to improve parking management and supply to assure that these activities are coordinated and do not create new problems as existing problems are solved.

IV. RECOMMENDED DOWNTOWN PARKING IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

There are three distinct components of the “parking problem” in Downtown Brunswick:

1. Parking for customers and other visitors to Downtown. This is typically relatively short term parking.
2. Parking for employees of Downtown businesses. This is typically longer term parking and in many cases involves all day parking.
3. Overnight parking for occupants of multi-family housing in the Downtown.

While these three components function somewhat independently, there is a strong interrelationship among the components. Residents parking in prime customer spaces or tying up all day parking can be a problem. Employees who space hop in two hour parking reduce the availability of short term parking for customers.

The Downtown Parking Committee has developed an integrated set of recommendations for improving the parking situation in Downtown Brunswick. The goal of the recommendations is to improve parking for all three groups without creating additional problems for the community.

Recommendation #1 The Town and business community should undertake a coordinated program to increase awareness of the existing parking supply.

A key element of the parking strategy is assuring that customers and other Downtown visitors clearly understand where public parking is available and what restrictions apply to the parking. This recommendation mirrors recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan and in the Downtown Master Development Plan.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following activities be undertaken:

1A. The Town and BIG should develop a simple program to make customers and consumers aware of the available customer parking in Downtown. This could involve the production of an 8 ½ x 11" map of public and customer parking in the Downtown.

1B. The Town should move forward with the recommendation of the Downtown Master Development Plan for the installation of distinctive directional signs to

lead travelers to the municipal parking lots.

1C. The Town should also install parking lot signs in each of the municipal parking lots clearly identifying these lots as public parking and setting out the parking restrictions that apply in each lot. The design of these signs should complement the directional signs discussed in B.

1D. The Town should review and revise, where necessary, the signing and curb painting for on-street parking to assure that motorists have a clear understanding of where parking is and is not permitted and what restrictions apply.

Recommendation #2 The Town should aggressively manage the supply of short term parking to maximize its availability for customers and visitors to the Downtown.

The analysis of the current parking situation suggests that customer parking is marginally adequate to meet current demand for short term parking but that during peak periods, well located customer parking is in short supply. Therefore, it is essential that the existing supply of two hour parking be managed to maximize the availability of this parking for customer use.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following activities be undertaken:

2A. The Town and BIG should undertake a coordinated program to discourage employees from using two hour parking including space hopping during the day. This program should include an effort to identify and work with employees who do regularly park in two hour parking and an educational component to make all Downtown employees aware of the importance of having customer parking available and the cost to Downtown of employees taking up the limited supply of customer parking.

2B. The Police Department should continue vigorous enforcement of the two hour parking limit with a focus on all day or long term parkers who use the short term parking.

Recommendation #3 The Town should work to expand the supply of well located, short term, customer parking in Downtown.

There are very few opportunities to easily expand the supply of convenient, short term, customer parking in Downtown. The Town has already capitalized on some of the possibilities. There is little potential for expanding the supply of on-street customer parking in the Core of Downtown.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following

activities be undertaken:

3A. The Town should develop two hour customer parking on the Maine Street end of the Maine Street Station parcel. This parking should be designed to meet the needs of businesses at the head of Maine Street that have limited parking. As part of this project, the entrances to the credit union should be redesigned to provide better directional control and to minimize the amount of area dedicated to vehicular circulation.

3B. When additional long term parking is developed, the Town should convert unrestricted spaces in the Town Lot off Bank Street and the Fire Station Lot off Cumberland Street to two hour parking as demand for short term parking warrants.

Recommendation #4 The Town, property owners, and Downtown businesses should work cooperatively to expand the supply of long term, employee parking in the core of the Downtown, in the Tontine Mall area, and at Fort Andross.

The community is at a critical decision point with respect to parking in Downtown Brunswick. While the current parking situation is marginal with respect to the baseline or typical conditions, the limited availability of parking, especially long term employee parking, is an impediment to revitalization and economic growth in Downtown. The surveys of property owners, business owners, and consumers document that the current parking situation makes leasing space in Downtown more difficult, discourages investment in the area, and discourages consumers from using Downtown.

The key piece in the parking puzzle is long term parking for employees of Downtown businesses. Existing, well located long term parking in the Core and Fort Andross areas is essentially fully utilized and there is some evidence that long term parkers “space hop” in the two hour parking spaces. This demand also limits the ability to expand the supply of two hour parking in the municipal parking lots.

Therefore, the community is faced with a difficult decision. It can continue with the existing supply of long term parking recognizing that this will probably impose economic limits on the vitality of Downtown. Or it can work to expand to supply of long term parking. This will not be easy since the community has already exploited many of the long term parking opportunities. The Parking Committee recommends that the Town and private sector interests work together to expand the supply of long term, employee parking in Downtown. To accomplish this, the committee proposes that the following activities be undertaken:

4A. The Town should attempt to lease the rear portion of the underutilized Gardiner Savings Bank lot for stickered all day parking for Downtown

employees. This will require a concentrated effort by the community to allow this use. The proposal should be to lease a specific portion of lot which can be segregated from the balance of lot to allow the all day parking to be controlled so that it does not interfere with the parking for the occupants of the building. Parking in the leased lot should be limited to all day users who obtain a parking sticker for the lot by paying a small monthly fee to the Town to offset the lease costs.

4B. The Town should work with the owners of Fort Andross and the other properties on Cabot Street to explore the vacation of a portion of Cabot Street to allow the parking to be reconfigured as proposed in the Downtown Master Development Plan. If this is successful, the Town and the owners of Fort Andross should enter into a land swap and cost sharing agreement for the development of expanded surface parking to meet the needs of tenants of Fort Andross and other nearby businesses.

4C. The Town should pursue the acquisition of the underutilized parking lot between Pleasant and Cumberland Streets adjacent to the existing Fire Station parking lot. If the Town is able to acquire the lot, it should undertake drainage improvements and make this into additional unrestricted, long term parking as an extension of the existing municipal lot.

4D. The Town, in conjunction with the School Department, should consider allowing use of the parking at the Hawthorne School during the summer vacation by employees of businesses in the Tontine Mall area. This parking should be made available to employees of businesses that obtain a parking sticker or pass from the Town. Parking should be restricted to long term users who do not interfere with other uses of the school facilities or create significant traffic.

4E. The Town should initiate discussions with the owners of Fort Andross relative to a public-private partnership to expand the parking supply on the north side of Route One to serve tenants of Fort Andross and other businesses at the north end of Downtown. If the owners of the property are interested, the initial step should be to conduct an engineering and financial feasibility study of the options for increased parking in this area. The cost of this study should be shared by the property owner and the Town.

4F. The Town should undertake an engineering and financial feasibility study and preliminary design study of converting the existing municipal parking lot off Bank street into a multi-level parking structure in conjunction with the redevelopment of the current municipal building for municipal or Police Department use. This study should evaluate the number of parking spaces that

could be developed in conjunction with the reuse of the facility, the potential cost of such a project, and the design of the facility so that it is compatible with the Downtown environment.

4G. If the School Department decides to close the Hawthorne School, the Town should explore the potential of converting this site into a long term parking lot to meet the parking needs of employees in the Tontine Mall area.

Recommendation #5 The Town should allow controlled overnight parking in designated areas of the municipal parking lots to increase the supply of resident parking.

There is a shortage of parking to serve residents who live in Downtown. This problem primarily involves tenants who rent in multi-family or mixed used buildings. Overnight parking is currently prohibited in the municipal parking lots.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following activity be undertaken:

5A. The Town should institute a program to allow “resident-only” overnight parking in the Bank Street Town Lot, the Mill Street Lot, and the Fire Station Lot. Under this program, residents of the Downtown would be able to obtain a parking sticker for a nominal monthly fee that would allow them to park overnight in designated two hour parking spaces in these three municipal parking lots. The conditions of the overnight parking program should require that residents’ cars be allowed to be parked in these lots between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. and that all vehicles in the program would need to be moved from the municipal lots by 8 a.m. on Monday through Saturday. Owners of vehicles that do not conform to the requirements of the program should not be allowed to participate in the overnight parking program in the future.

Recommendation #6 The Town should create a permanent mechanism for funding parking improvements in Downtown Brunswick.

There currently is no consensus for who should be responsible for paying for public parking improvements in Downtown Brunswick. Historically, this has been a public responsibility with the Town paying all or most of the costs for parking improvements. Since many of the proposed improvements involve significant costs, the Parking Committee recommends that a funding mechanism be established to allow the public and private sectors to share the costs of future public parking improvements.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following activities be undertaken.

6A. The Town should explore creating a dedicated Downtown parking improvement fund that can be periodically funded and used for Downtown parking improvements.

6B. The Town should amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow development activities in the Downtown area to not provide off-street parking if they pay a parking impact fee that is used to fund parking improvements in the Downtown area.

6C. The Town should explore creating a “Downtown Improvement District”. This district would be responsible for managing and promoting the Downtown and for working with the Town on improving parking. The district could be funded through the creation of a special tax assessment district. Under this arrangement, property owners in the district pay a supplemental property tax that is earmarked for the operation of the district and/or specific improvements or activities within the district. These incremental property tax revenues could be used to pay some of the costs associated with Downtown parking improvements.

Recommendation #7 The Town should improve the quality and usability of the pedestrian access to existing municipal parking lots.

Users of the public parking lots must be able to safely and conveniently walk from the parking lot to their destination. Pedestrian access from the Bank Street Town Lot and the Fire Station Lot is less than desirable and should be improved.

To accomplish this recommendation, the Parking Committee proposes that the following activities be undertaken:

7A. The Town should develop a sidewalk or other pedestrian way linking the Fire Station Lot to Maine Street. The mostly likely location for such a facility would be along Town Hall Place.

7B. The Town should try to acquire a pedestrian easement across the Jenny Station parcel to allow the construction of a sidewalk from the south end of the Bank Street Town Lot to Maine Street. If the Town is successful in obtaining the easement, the sidewalk should be constructed to create an attractive link between Maine Street and the parking lot.