

Downtown Stratford Parking Strategy 2016 – Summary

Stratford Ontario



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10/4/2016

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Executive Summary

The original scope of this project is as an investigation of current municipal parking activity patterns in downtown Stratford in the summer of 2015. The scope broaden to include the development of a downtown parking strategy. That strategy is to provide a strategic roadmap towards the continued provision of a high level of customer service to tourists and those that work and visit in the downtown.

The project methodology includes three major technical tasks: Parking Demand Analysis, Parking Supply Response to that demand, and the identification of where current and future market opportunities exist and emerge from changes to demand and supply within the downtown.

Parking demand analysis features direct input from customers. An online survey gathered evidence that assisted to define trip durations, trip purposes and how far customers are willing to walk to and from parking space and primary destination.

Parking supply response to that demand features field data collection of vehicles parked. Key parking metrics (volume, duration of stay and turnover) were gathered and synthesized to form an understanding of the current and future balance between parking demand and parking supply. The field surveys were conducted over the course of two days in summer and then again in December in 2015.

The third task brings together insights from both demand and supply utilization analysis to identify current and future marketing opportunities for the delivery of public parking service. The opportunities result from changes in the underlying factors that drive the parking demand. These changes are the physical environment in the form of site developments (Market Square and Cooper site for example); changes to operations in the service delivery system; and, changes to the way in which our customers interact to the downtown and the shopping trip in the future.

The outcome of the above three major tasks is presented in the form of a set of strategic actions. The over-arching framework of this parking strategy is that the City of Stratford should continue to deliver public parking service rooted in **quality of service, innovation, and sustainability**.

The recommended initiatives, rationale, and time-line are in the sub-reports. Here is a summary.

Short-range planning horizon (immediate to 2 Years hence):

1. Maintain the off-street parking inventory and the current level of parking service in the downtown by first continuing to monitor parking activity patterns in their use. While the parking surveys show some capacity on the off-street parking facilities that capacity can respond to changes that may occur on Market Square.
2. The vital role that the various public parking facilities play in satisfying parking demand in the downtown requires the securing of a long-term ownership of the asset. The strategy also stresses the potential for the development of multiple uses on these parking sites.

3. The strategy should provide long-term commitment to the continued provision of accessible parking stalls on both on- and off-street facilities. Review design standards and strategic location of such space as a matter of planning and operations of the public parking business in Stratford.
4. Cooper site's development potential and its current operation as a free parking operation plays a vital role in shaping current and future parking service. The strategy calls for a review of its operations. Although its redevelopment may occur beyond this short range planning horizon, parking activity review needs to be maintained in order that we can respond to its impact on other parking facilities within the downtown should the Cooper site be expanded, reduced or maintained as-is.
5. The strategy recommends an enhancement to the service delivery model. We recommend that we begin to convert current system of metered spaces, pay, and display systems to state-of-the-art technology. The strategy spoke to enhancing payment options, and flexibility in customer service. The recommendation is that we pursue "Pay-by-Licence" and "Pay-by-Cell" technologies. Both systems will not require the customer to go back and place a parking receipt on their vehicle dashboard, and both provide the convenience of sending messages to a customer when they are nearing expiration of time. The systems allow for pre-paid cards and flexibility in time restrictions and charges over the course of the day. Enforcement systems become more streamlined and effective when such systems are in place. The strategy suggests that roll-out of this new technology begin with Erie lot as its parking control system is in need of repair shortly.
6. The parking strategy speaks to the assignment of contract monthly contracts to at least 20 percent of inventory. This is especially sensitive to the seasonality of the parking demand pattern here that allows us more capacity when the theatre and tourist volumes are not there. The strategy also wants to initiate the discussion of extending pay parking periods beyond 18:00 hours to match business operations.
7. The strategy document provides a lot-by-lot assessment of potential and their relative role in the provision of parking service. Erie, York, and Albert sites are crucial to the parking service and they are geometrically acceptable as structured parking sites when the need arises in the longer-range planning horizon.

Mid-range planning horizon (3 to 5 Years hence):

1. Maintain the current three hour time restriction and hourly charges for on street municipal parking service and maintain the current cost of parking permits for on and off street at their current rates with a review every three (3) years.

2. Market the time restriction and the role of on and off street parking space through online media tools, as well as, colour-code identification system on the pay stations to convey the notion that parking spaces should attract customers with varying lengths of stay over the course of the day.
3. The strategy speaks to the initiative of enhancing way-finding system as it relates to public parking. In particular, the initiative would bring clarity as to where public parking is available and graphically communicate key time restrictions (3, 5, or 12 hour maximum).
4. Consider the inclusion of information kiosks on parking facilities to provide shopping, geographic information to our customers. This kind of service links parking service to the fabric of the market area that it serves.
5. Link to Active Transportation Initiatives. Treat parking sites as a stage for vehicles and other travel modes including **bike**, electric vehicles, self-parking vehicles.
6. Ensure that pedestrian links from parking space to destinations reflect safety (lighting, pavement condition and safety kiosk devices to assist our customers).
7. Continue the program to convert current revenue control system to "Pay by License Plate" Pay and Display unit for both on and off street facilities.
8. Maintain enforcement fines for parked at expired "meter". Review the fine amount every three (3) years when the parking operation reviews the charges for parking across the whole system. This three-year review window is common in the industry.
9. Continue to monitor parking activity trends in occupancy of space, duration of stay profiles and turnover of parking space with the view of improvement and adjustment to parking rates, time restrictions and the parking system's response to changing land use (demand) conditions in the short and long term planning horizon.
10. Expand and explore communication themes through the broader use of municipal online site. This strategy ties back to way finding and provides a channel to communicate findings of parking surveys, provide payment of fines option, and to receive online feedback on performance and planning concerns from the customer base. The study team spoke to the potential to pre-pay parking when theatre patrons purchase their tickets online.

Longer-range Planning Horizon (beyond 6 years)

1. Continue to monitor parking activity trends in occupancy of space, duration of stay profiles and turnover of parking space with the view of improvement and adjustment to parking

rates, time restrictions and the parking system's response to changing land use (demand) conditions in the short and long term planning horizon.

2. Stratford will continue to monitor land use (new development and redevelopment) and their impact on parking supply over the mid and longer range planning horizons. It is especially important to include parking services in the discussion of Cooper site. This site is a major determinant to the quantity of parking demand in the downtown. As well, its development will affect how existing municipal parking supply should respond to that demand.

Discussion of Key Issue Related to Parking Structures

The recommended initiative specific to the question of building parking structures rests with the continued analysis of parking activity as it responds to changes in the supporting land use base. The study proposes that we answer the following questions to rationalize the development of structures in downtown Stratford.

1. Is there documented evidence that the underlying demand for parking is changing?

Parking space demand responds to parking demand generated by land use intensification or significant changes to the commercial land use quantity. During the period of this parking study, two developments came in scope of this project - the Market Square and the Cooper site. While each site was still in the planning phases, several design options were presented to the consultant.

The technical discussion is contained in the attached sub-report: **Reflections on Market Square Development - Parking Strategy Options**. The urban planning question is whether a public structured facility should be incorporated in the re-purposed site plan for Cooper site. If so, should it be continue to be marketed as free of charge. The study discussed the "distortion" of walking distance and use due to the current free parking space product. If the City wants to subsidize the development and operating costs and abandon the self-sustaining business mission of public parking in Stratford, building a free cost Parkade on the Cooper site should be long-term key to this parking management strategy. It would mean that all other current off-street sites and their consideration as structured parking development sites should be deferred until Cooper site is completed and its parking activity is fully measured.

A parking management strategy that features pushing any additional supply to the outer support core of the downtown - such as Cooper site - is important. Supply located in that outer core serves the parking market although this initiative requires slightly longer walking distances. Supply located in that outer core serves to distribute traffic in and out of the downtown away from the currently congested core area that not only serves traffic flow but also provides a measure of safety with reduction of volume in that core area.

Technical Report A – Parking Demand Analysis discusses current land use and its attraction of peak hour parking trips. The attraction levels of different land use types demonstrates that in order for an additional layer of parking (say 200 parking spaces) on the Erie lot to become critical, the downtown

floor space volume would have to net increase between 11,111 and 20,000 square metres based on observed peak hour trip demands attraction. This quantity of commercial floor space would represent the **threshold** that attracts enough demand to require 200 additional spaces.

2. Do the parking activity metrics collected and analysed in this parking study provide indication that the downtown requires additional parking space in the form of structured facilities?

Three primary parking metrics: volume, duration of stay and occupancy of parking space over the course of the day are presented in **Technical Report B: Parking Supply Response**. Key off-street parking facilities in the downtown are performing as expected. The Erie lot has capacity to absorb changes to volume, duration of stay and accumulation that will arise from changes in its most immediate catchment area. The parking activity metrics of the off-street parking sites are reflection of optimal use and of having enough space to continue to satisfy parking demand in the immediate and short-range planning horizon.

The parking metric analysis went further to indicate the importance of reaching 90 percent of capacity but for a more sustained period of the day. These periods of intensity were documented to show that currently Albert St lot reflects a sustained period of intensity. The Albert St lot is in excellent position to continue to respond to any growing demands in its catchment area but its geometry does not lend itself to an efficient parking structure development.

The Erie lot shows excess capacity. While its geometry is best suited to a parking structure, the current parking metrics do not provide a solid case for building a parking structure today or in the short-range planning horizon.

The parking study stressed that Erie site may be the most optimal geometry for a structure (mixed used development) but the Cooper site's current free parking market landscape provides an unknown in the economic analysis. The parking study provided some historical data based on previous consulting studies that pointed to a drop of 33 percent of the parking demand when parking services went from free to a user charge for their use. That measure of impact makes the case for structured parking at Erie more risky.

3. If demand reached the optimal level that would require adding parking space in the form of a structure in the core of the downtown, what operational measures are required to build a more solid economic foundation?

A pro-forma exercise was conducted and presented in the sub-report: **Reflections on Market Square Development - Parking Strategy Options**. Within a public parking mission statement of providing service to the customer that is of high **quality**; and a service that reflects **innovation** that ultimately better serves the customer and makes the service delivery system more effective and efficient; and a service that is fully **sustainable** and supports the overall transportation system in Stratford, the following operational strategies are key:

- In order to build self-sustaining operation that can support the construction and operation of parking structures when required, a more solid revenue base must be established through a gradual increase in rates charged on both on and off street parking service. The report suggests a gradual increase be implemented every three years and that increase reflect the cost of structured parking space.
- Parking enforcement service is essential to maintain the turnover and fair use of limited parking space. Through technological innovation ("Pay by Licence" or "Pay by Space") costs of this vital service can be more effective and efficient. The recommendation is to review the cost of fines at the same time that the rates charged are reviewed - again with the target set to provide enough reserve funding for the longer term goal of structured parking if and when the need arises.
- Automate parking operations through the implementation of current technology. Operations style should reflect the objective of servicing a broader range of payment options, and respond to the demographic and tourist marketplace here in Stratford. In our study team discussions, we spoke of pre-purchasing parking space service along with theatre tickets that would direct patrons to known available parking spaces in the downtown.
- As discussed in **Technical Report A**, developing technologies such as autonomous and shared economy transportation systems, along with the already visible impact of online purchasing of goods and services have had and will continue to have on the parking space demand. The parking strategy here needs to be mindful of these changes and they should provide a framework for operational and structural changes in the way in which parking service delivers to the customer.
- Accept that any development in the longer term planning horizon that may include structured parking space should also include residential and/or commercial development components. Part of our parking management strategy here should reflect the value of parking service but also reflect that a Parkade-only development on valuable municipal property resource is not prudent. The multiple use aspect of any future development of parking site resources supports a tight and intense commercial profile that is successful in the core. Multiple site uses also opens up opportunities for shared private and public investment on these critical land resources.

Final Word

The parking strategy project has provided you with a number of metrics that indicate current and potential performance of the parking service in downtown Stratford. Through online surveys parking demand was determined and we began to understand where people are going in the downtown and gained some insight to how they make a choice of where to park. A number of responses in that questionnaire assisted us to look at a number of maintenance, operational and planning strategies.

The survey of the use of existing parking supply in the downtown were conducted and detailed in Technical Report B. Key parking metrics of volume, duration of stay and accumulation of vehicles over the course of the day provided the report with evidence of an optimal parking system. That analysis also

pointed to areas where we can improve and/or start to investigate enhancements to the parking service.

Two additional sub-reports were provided by the Consultant. The first dealt with specific interest in the performance of the Accessible parking service in the downtown. The report **Accessible Parking Activity - Snapshot Summary** is attached in this package.

The second of these sub-reports dealt with the impact on this study of the proposed Market Square re-development. The report **Reflections on Market Square Development - Parking Strategy Options** is attached to this package as well. That report contains preliminary pro-forma estimates of the financial feasibility of developing multi-storey parking facilities.

