

White Paper #2: Proposed Guiding Principles for Downtown Parking

1.0 Introduction

This memorandum outlines a draft set of Guiding Principles for the management of parking in downtown Hood River. This preliminary draft was developed based on the input received from the Ad Hoc Committee¹ and is intended to illicit comments, discussion, and additional input from the Committee.

The goal is to ensure that these proposed Guiding Principles are reflective of the intent, purpose, and priorities of the Ad Hoc Committee for managing parking in the downtown.



Input received at upcoming Committee meetings and scheduled public forums will be used to further revise and refine this draft prior to presenting a draft set of Guiding Principles to the Hood River City Council. A final set of Guiding Principles will be established following input and refinement from Council.

2.0 Stakeholder Committee Input

A successful downtown has a clear sense of place and offers an enticing mix of uses and amenities. The role of parking is to support the pursuit of this vision. *People do not come downtown to park*; they come to experience an environment that is unique, active, and diverse. A well-organized and effective parking system makes it safe, easy, and convenient for them to do so. Getting the right parker to the right stall – making a place for each user of downtown – defines a successful parking program.

2.1. Desired Outcomes

If parking is to be successful, the parking management plan will need to make the parking system:

- **Convenient**
 - “Make parking invisible” and ensure that users who choose to drive can visit and experience downtown with minimal delay related to finding and paying for parking.²
 - Create a parking system that lets users find a convenient space and take advantage of downtown’s walkable environment to connect to stores, restaurant, business, and recreational destinations.

¹ April 2, 2019 Committee Meeting; specific comments that informed the development of each Guiding Principle are shown in blue boxes.

² The consultant’s interpretation of this comment isn’t that parking should be invisible in the sense of free and abundant, but rather easy to find for those who prefer to drive and pay.

- **Clear**
 - Clearly communicate how and where to find appropriate and available parking; make parking understandable. “Make it easy for users to park and get to their destination.”
 - Ensure that the community understands and recognizes that all users are beneficiaries of parking.

- **Attainable**
 - Eliminate any parking-related obstacles and barriers to downtown development.

- **Multimodal**
 - Prioritize pedestrian and bicyclist safety, comfort, and convenience.
 - Use parking to integrate with and encourage increased use of alternative modes (transit, bike, and walk).
 - Effectively change behavior.

- **Flexible**
 - Anticipate and respond to increasing demand for access to the downtown.
 - Maximize the use of existing parking resources and construct additional parking only as a last resort.

- **Equitable**
 - Ensure equity in regulations.

2.2. Supporting Hood River’s Unique Character

Hood River is a special place. It is beautiful community, connected to nature and provides a high quality of life to its residents and visitors. Management of the parking system should reinforce and enhance Hood River’s unique qualities and character; striving to accommodate long-time residents and employees as well as the thriving tourist economy. These qualities include:

- A *family friendly*, small town feel.
- An *amenity-rich* community with a variety of options and great attractions.
- A compact and *walkable downtown* with a variety of high-quality businesses and attractions.
- A year-round city with a downtown that is connected to not just business but to opportunities for *recreation* and other *outdoor activities*.
- An *attractive destination downtown* that is both connected to nature (e.g., Columbia River Gorge, Mt. Hood) but still conveniently proximate to “big city” amenities just an hour car drive away (Portland).



- The downtown is *diverse* and easy to get around with fairly limited congestion.

3.0 Guiding Principles – Elements of Parking Management

The Guiding Principles outlined here are summarized under theme categories. The categories reflect input from the desired outcomes while being mindful of Hood River’s unique character. The intent is to establish a basis for consensus and provide both near- and long-term direction for parking management in downtown. The principles are presented in no particular order or priority.

A. Priority Users

- a.1) **On-Street System (Downtown):** *The most convenient on-street parking will be preserved for the priority user: the customer trip.³*

The on-street parking system in the downtown must continue to be formatted in a manner that supports turnover and minimizes conflicts between the priority user and other users. For the most part, employees and residents should not park on-street in downtown, particularly when demand for customer parking is high.

“On-street parking should be available for customers.”

- a.2) **On-Street System (Immediately Adjacent Neighborhoods):** *The most convenient on-street parking will be preserved for the priority user: the resident and their guests.*

As with on-street parking in the downtown, neighborhood parking must be formatted in a manner that assures priority access and minimizes conflicts between the residential users in a neighborhood and other users. For the most part, employees should not park on-street in residential areas, particularly when demand for parking by neighborhood residents and guests is high. When demand is low and/or surpluses of parking exist, the City can accommodate non-priority users in the on-street system for interim periods.

“There should be a parity of options for employees and residents.”

“Need to be mindful of residents, particularly in areas where they have no other option when the street is full.”

- a.3) **Off-Street System:** *Coordinate off-street parking resources (public and private) to meet employee demand; while balancing the need in public off-street facilities to also accommodate visitor needs.*

“Maximize the use of existing parking resources.”

All parking strategies, particularly for employees, should be coordinated with the City’s broader transportation demand management goals

³ Customer is defined here as anyone using businesses downtown by a transient trip – this includes shopping, eating, entertainment, recreating, and visiting downtown amenities. As such, a customer can be a shopper, tourist or local resident visiting the downtown.

and objectives to ensure that users have reasonable options available for access (which includes auto, transit, bike, walk, and ridesharing). The parking system, both on and off-street, should be managed holistically for optimal use. This effort should be pursued as a partnership between the City and private sector businesses.

B. Active Capacity Management

- b.1) **Optimize Utilization:** *Manage the public parking system using the 85% Occupancy Standard to inform and guide decision-making.*

The 85% Rule is an operating principle for coordinating parking supply. When occupancies routinely reach 85% during peak periods, more intensive and targeted parking management strategies are called for to assist priority users in finding available parking. The 85% Rule will facilitate reasonable and data-driven decisions regarding time stays, enforcement, and other practices related to capacity management.

Changes to the status quo can be difficult, but continued constraints in parking and access will adversely impact the downtown's success and ability to attract and absorb growth.

"Cars move and circulate fairly well, generally good turnover."

"With growth, tension is growing within the parking system among user groups."

- b.2) **Shared Off-Street Parking:** *Encourage shared parking in areas where parking is underutilized (within the downtown and remotely in facilities linked by other modes). This will require an active partnership with owners of private parking supplies.*

The 2018 parking study showed that private parking facilities in downtown may be underutilized; even during periods of overall peak use. Efforts should be made to facilitate shared use agreements between different users (public and private) to direct parking demand into these facilities in order to optimize the utilization of existing parking resources. This may require linking more remote locations via shuttles or transit.

"Treat all parking in downtown as a shared resource."

C. Information Systems

- c.1) **Branding & Wayfinding:** *Create a wayfinding system for the downtown that links parking assets and provides directional guidance, preferably under a common brand or logo.*

The City needs to ensure that all public parking resources are clearly identified and communicated through common branding and signage. This will increase awareness and understanding of how to access on- and off-street parking resources. A common brand unifies marketing materials, signage systems, and other communications and simplifies customer recognition and use of the system. All systems should be reliable and easy to use and understand.

“Perceived problem that parking is difficult to find.”

“Signage and wayfinding are largely ineffective, doesn’t direct visitors to parking.”

- c.2) **Monitor & Report Utilization:** *Implement performance measurements and reporting to facilitate decision-making.*

Committing to a routine and objective system of measurement and reporting ensures that decision-making will be informed by data. Key metrics include occupancy, turnover, average duration of stay, rate of violation, and customer input. Performance monitoring also provides a basis for routine evaluation of program effectiveness. Accurate and reliable information about parking system performance supports good decision-making and provides transparency for the community.

“Anticipate and respond to increasing demand for access to the downtown.”

D. Integration with Other Modes

- d.1) **Travel Demand Management:** *Encourage and facilitate increasing percentages of use, particularly by employees, of alternative travel modes to free up parking capacity.*

Vehicle parking should not be the only access option, particularly for employees. Every parking stall occupied by an employee means a lower rate of turnover and less access for visitors and customers. Employees should be given reasonable access to parking, but encouraged to use alternative modes that include walking, biking, transit, and ridesharing. Nearby residents should be encouraged to use Hood River’s sidewalk system to access downtown.

“Use parking to integrate with, and encourage, increased use of alternative modes (transit, bike and walk).”

“A successful parking plan will effectively change behavior.”

Community members from greater distances should be encouraged to bicycle and ride transit for downtown access. Providing safe and

reliable non-auto modes of access to downtown (walking, biking, transit) relieves pressure on the parking system, enhances the attractiveness of downtown, and accommodates a variety of types of users. This Guiding Principle should complement and integrate with Active Capacity Management goals (2.a. and 2.b.).

E. Planning for Future Supply

- e.1) **Code & Regulation:** *The City’s development code should not be a barrier to new parking development, while ensuring that adequate parking is provided and “right sized” to Hood River’s unique environment.*

Hood River’s downtown development code for parking should be structured to reflect the City’s vision for land use growth (commercial and residential). Its minimum requirements should reflect the realities of parking demand in Hood River, with reasonable and flexible standards to ensure that parking capacity grows feasibly and in formats that can be maximized and shared.

“Eliminate any parking related obstacles and barriers to downtown development.”

- e.2) **Funding:** *Planning for future parking supply growth will be strategic and routinely evaluated to ensure the City is ready to respond to growth, recognizing that assembling funding for new growth takes time and will require a varied package of funding resources (and partnerships).*

The City must plan for its supply growth needs and initiate long-term planning efforts to assemble funding and partnerships necessary to that growth.

“The current fee-in-lieu system is not workable for new development in downtown.”

F. Financial Viability⁴

- f.1) **Fiscal Stewardship:** *All parking operations must be financially sustainable.*

Parking revenues should cover the cost of operations while providing reasonable surpluses to ensure the highest quality access product, customer convenience, system maintenance, safety, and service delivery. This will require multiple funding sources for parking operations, maintenance, and system growth. Sources can include leases, enforcement fees, hourly rates and other user fees, and/or partnerships with the private sector.

“Ensure that the community understands and recognizes that all users are beneficiaries of parking.”

⁴ This suggested Guiding Principle did not come directly out of the Ad Hoc Committee work session and discussion. It is provided here at the recommendation of the consultant team.

F. Roles and Coordination

g.1) **Primary Role (City of Hood River):** *The City's role in providing public parking is listed in priority order and includes:*

- *Accommodating customer/visitor access downtown;*
- *Providing (in partnership with the private sector) reasonable access for downtown employees;*
- *Facilitating residential and/or guest access in neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the downtown.*

"The City is primarily responsible for supplying parking to customers."

The cost for providing parking, especially off-street, is very high. The City cannot be fully responsible for providing parking to all users. The City's role must prioritize downtown's public system for customers and visitors.

g.2) **Primary Role (Private Sector):** *Employee parking should be led by the private sector and through partnerships where the City can reasonably participate (financially or programmatically).*

The private sector must take a lead role in providing parking for downtown employees. The City can complement the private sector role with surpluses in its supply and by providing safe, reliable, and effective non-auto access to downtown.

"Off-street parking for employees should be provided through a strategic balance of responsibility, led by the private sector. Given the cost of off-street parking the City can play a role as opportunities and partnerships occur."

g.3) **Stakeholder Support:** *Ensure that a representative body of affected private and public constituents routinely informs decision-making.⁵*

Active participation by those affected by parking strategies helps to build an understanding of the inherent tradeoffs in all parking management decisions. This will be best accomplished through an established parking advisory committee that reviews performance metrics, serves as a sounding board for issues, and acts as a liaison to the broader stakeholder community.

⁵ As with Guiding Principle F, this principle was not directly referenced in the Ad Hoc Committee work session and is recommended by the consultant team.