

TOWN OF MANCHESTER

DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY



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INTRODUCTION

Downtown Manchester, Connecticut, has been defined and represented since 1991 as the Downtown Special Services District (SSD). The geographic extent of this area is the stretch of Main Street in Manchester between Center Street (Routes 6 and 44) in the North to Hartford Road/Charter Oak Street in the South, with immediately surrounding streets to the East and West of Main Street. Though regional development patterns over several decades have reduced commercial and retail activity in the Downtown area, the Town of Manchester and the SSD have worked to retain and revive this area as a vibrant center of business, cultural activity, residential opportunities, and civic life.

Though Downtown Manchester developed much of its current form in the pre-automobile era, the reality of accommodating vehicles is central to the long-term success of downtown business, commerce, and residential life. Ensuring an adequate supply of parking and its efficient management in turn supports this success. This study was commissioned by the Town of Manchester, through a grant from the Connecticut Main Street Center and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, to better help analyze current parking conditions, develop an understanding of likely future parking demand, and to make recommendations for improving supply and/or management of parking spaces in the Downtown area.

It is understood that Downtown Manchester as a commercial entity exists in competition with other areas of the region for tenants, visitors, and customers. The classic, walkable Main Street atmosphere, architectural integrity, and mix of uses are all key to its distinct character and success. The goal of this study, and the long-term goal of Downtown Manchester, is to improve public amenities and customer service while enhancing, or at least not compromising, the sense of place that defines the uniqueness of Downtown Manchester.

BACKGROUND AND UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEM

The Downtown Manchester SSD functions, among other things, as the parking authority for the Downtown area and manages eight municipal parking areas with a total of over 800 spaces. Except for the Pearl Street lot in the northern section of Downtown, the substantial majority of lots are located between Bissell Street and Forest/Maple Street and serve what is considered the “core” of Downtown business activity. In addition to the municipal lots, the SSD manages and monitors on-street parking along Main Street. Additional parking is available along side streets and in numerous private parking lots.

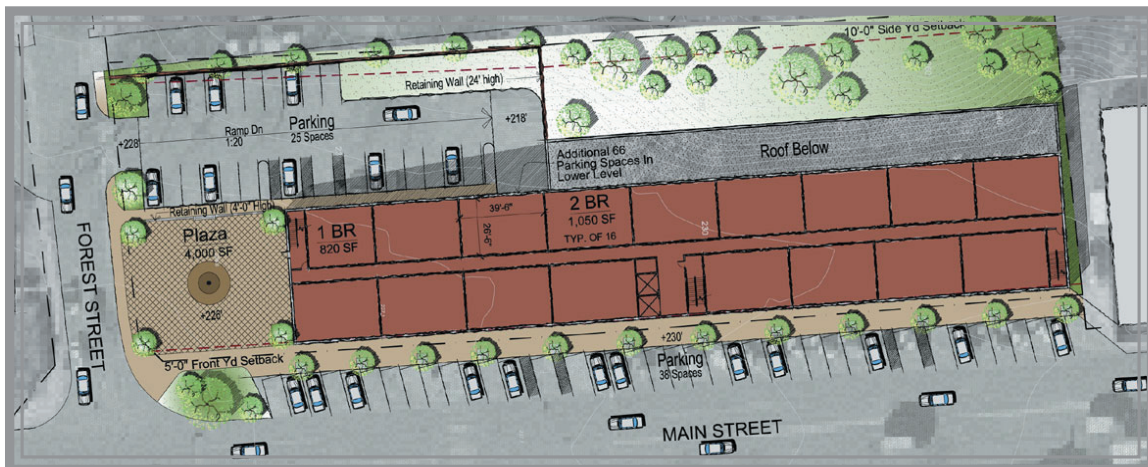


Parking area. Forest Street

In an effort to encourage customer traffic in the Downtown area, the SSD has chosen to make all short-term parking free of charge. Visitors to Downtown and customers are able to park for free for up to two hours in any of the municipal lots, as well as on Main Street itself. This parking is available between the hours of 6 a.m. and 2 a.m. In addition, free all-day parking is available at the Cottage Street Lot on the corner of Cottage and Oak Streets. For longer-term parking, directed at tenants and employees of Downtown businesses, parking permits are available. Parking permits cost \$16.50 per month for unlimited daytime parking in any lot (spaces are not assigned) and fees support the SSD’s operations, including parking enforcement, plowing, lot maintenance, etc. Enforcement of parking occurs via the SSD’s part-time parking officer, who works a flexible schedule of approximately 20 hours per week. Fines for over-time parking are \$10-15, and revenues from fines are deposited into the Town of Manchester’s general fund. Parking enforcement along side streets is primarily the responsibility of the Manchester Police Department, but the Parking Enforcement Officer assists in these areas as well. Overnight parking from the small number of residential units along Main Street is allowed in a section of the Purnell Place Lot between Birch Street and Purnell Place.

There are a number of concerns, both perceived and manifest, that have led to the commissioning of this parking study. There is a repeated and somewhat general concern that “there is not enough parking Downtown” expressed primarily by business and property owners. A survey conducted as part of this study asked about parking improvements, and increasing the availability of parking for customers/clients (44.7%) and for employees (31.6%) were two of the three most popular responses. This perceived shortage seems to be focused, both geographically and temporally. Though there are business, commercial, civic, educational, nonprofit, and residential uses along the entire length of Main Street in the Downtown area, the highest concentration of parking demand is between Birch Street and Maple Street (see map). The properties along Main Street in this stretch have demanded the most parking availability, and will likely continue to do so into the foreseeable future. This demand is almost entirely weekday-based, with weekday businesses open between 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. creating the most parking demand.

As with all things, the occupancy and use intensity of Downtown Manchester is in flux. Retail businesses have declined over the last several years, but new restaurants and service businesses have taken their place. Office uses are common and diverse, including several banks, real estate agents, medical offices, insurance, churches, and computer services. An adult day-care center and job training center also have become active over the last few years. Finally, residential units are appearing and becoming more prevalent. Where there are now between 25 - 30 residential units above storefronts along the core of Main Street, this number is projected to be a total of 70 - 80 units over the next several years. Additionally, office infill could create and change parking demand. Finally, in a recent study conducted by Crosskey Architects, LLC, the Town explored the potential of converting several underutilized parking lots to a more active use. The most probable of these options is the addition of a mixed use building in the lot 1050 Main Street (“Forest Street lot”) which would both reduce existing parking and increase the localized demand for other available parking.



Mixed Use building concept, (Forest Street lot, 1050 Main Street) rendering provided by Crosskey Architects, LLC.

The purpose of the study is twofold. The first goal is to determine whether a true parking short-fall exists. This study examined current parking permits, general utilization of available parking relative to the generators of parking demand, and questions of allocation and enforcement. The second goal is to project to what extent parking demand will grow and change over the next several years, and how to allocate and manage the parking demand that appears because of that change.



A sign on Main Street indicates the location of a pedestrian route to off street parking.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This study was undertaken using a number of data sources, including parking permit data from the Town of Manchester Customer Service Center, property ownership data from the Town of Manchester Assessor's Office and Geographic Information System Department, and business data from the Downtown Manchester Special Services District Office. Regulations concerning parking, including Zoning Regulations, Manchester Parking Ordinances, and SSD Parking policies were reviewed, as was the recent parking-lot reuse study conducted by Crosskey Architects. Individual interviews were conducted with Town staff, SSD staff, business owners and members of the SSD Board, and the Parking Enforcement Officer, who provided extensive insight into parking conditions and patterns. A parking survey was conducted, via web (www.surveymonkey.com/s/LNSW9KP) and mailed/faxed hard-copy to business owners and tenants in the Birch Street-Maple Street section of Main Street. One hundred and eleven (111) surveys were distributed, and 38 were completed and returned, which is a respectable 34% response rate for a survey of this type. Site visits to observe and document parking conditions were conducted on several different occasions, including Thursday, June 10 (10-11 a.m.), Monday, June 14 (1-2 p.m.), Thursday, June 24 (9-11 a.m.), Friday, July 9 (2-3 p.m.), and Thursday, July 29 (9-10 a.m.). It should be noted that "peak" demand refers to that condition in which the maximum number of vehicles are simultaneously occupying parking spaces.



Parking lot on Birch Street during peak occupancy.

CURRENT PARKING CONDITIONS

As stated above, municipal parking in Downtown has three primary components: on-street, private lot, and municipal lot. For the purposes of this study, private lots are not extensively reviewed. Current use of available parking is centered around the Main Street on-street options and municipal parking areas between Bissell Street and Maple Street/Forest Street. Though discussions with Town of Manchester staff, SSD staff, the Parking Enforcement Officer, and members of the SSD board revealed potential parking concerns in other areas such as the Pearl Street lot and School Street, the significant majority of the parking management issues are within this much smaller geographic area.

With a few exceptions, the business activity in the central part of Main Street in Downtown Manchester is centered around traditional weekday working hours. The several largest employment centers and parking generators are banks, medical or dental offices, law firms, insurance companies, computer technology providers, job training centers, and adult day care providers whose relatively predictable hours, staffing levels, and customer traffic create steady parking demand between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. In most of these cases, the parking demand for employees or staff is full-day or nearly so, and generally is more substantial than that of client/customer demand. The best example of this is the New Alliance Bank



New Alliance Bank at 923 Main Street.

at 923 Main Street. This is a full-service bank but also a financial services center and occasional employee-training center. This business has acquired 175 parking permits for its employees, most of whom are full-time equivalents. During non-training periods, the bank will only have between 10-15 customers at peak. Though the Bank is the extreme example of a business of this type, other service-oriented businesses (insurance brokers, law firms, etc.) would see the same approximate mix of full-time, weekday employees to customers. In this way, parking demand is relatively easy to gauge based on staffing levels. Medical and dental offices, as well as smaller service-based businesses will tend to have a more equal number of staff and customers at any given time, though these numbers are smaller both individually and in the aggregate, than the offices mentioned above.

A smaller number of businesses along Main Street are more customer-oriented and depend upon the ready availability of parking in proximity to the business. Restaurants, cafés, retail

shops, florists, convenience stores, and salons are uses that have relatively few staff or employees to serve a larger number of customers. Though customer turnover for a café or florist may be similar to that of a bank or medical office in terms of time in a parking spot, the convenience of parking for the former is perhaps more critical. These businesses also tend to have peak times that do not necessarily co-occur with standard weekday hours. Several restaurants and retail businesses see parking peaks in the early evenings (5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.) or on weekends. Main Street also has a small number of cafes that are very active on both weekday and weekend mornings, in approximately the 6:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. timeframe, but this traffic is often dispersed as the business activity in the Downtown area emerges. Certainly the churches in the area also see substantially higher peaks during service times on the weekends, but this does not coincide or exacerbate the peak business parking-generation times.

Another special case in Downtown Manchester that has created some parking concern is the usage connected with New Seasons, an adult day-care facility that has 30 parking permits and uses spaces immediately to the rear of their main entrance at 42 Purnell Place. Virtually all of the permits are for employees of the care center. The concern arises from the use of the mobility-equipped vans utilized by New Seasons and used to transport clients to the facility. The vans are large, and the active loading and unloading of clients has the potential to block traffic and parking spots. Although in the municipal lots there are no spaces assigned to particular businesses, the Parking Enforcement Officer and New Seasons have developed a largely workable solution in which the New Seasons staff parks generally in two adjacent rows and the vans park during loading and unloading in such a way to only block New Seasons staff vehicles. Given the space limitations in this portion of Purnell Place, this seems to be the most reasonable solution.

Finally, the small but growing number of residential units have a relatively stable parking demand of 1-2 vehicles per unit with occasional visitors boosting this number. In mixed-use areas, residential parking peaks tend to operate opposite business peaks, with residential parking demand peaking between 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 a.m. and on weekends when most offices are closed, though in less macroscopic studies this is not necessarily the case. A residential unit in a downtown setting such as Manchester could easily be occupied by a Main Street employee or business owner, who thereby would tend to occupy a single parking spot most of the time.

Though the specifics of each business and user category will continue to change as businesses expand, shrink, or re-locate, the major conclusion to be drawn in terms of current parking demand is that weekday business hours between 9:00 a.m and 5:00 p.m. comprise the predominant peak timeframe. There are localized peaks such as church services on weekend mornings and outlier events such as the Manchester Road Race or Cruisin' on Main Street, but from a general parking demand management perspective, it is this window that requires the most attention.

Parking Permits: As noted earlier, parking permits are available for purchase from the Town of Manchester to allow vehicles to park in any of the municipal lots in the Downtown SSD for

any length of time between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 2:00 a.m. There are no specially designated reserved spots for permit holders, though in the Purnell Place Lot several spaces in each row closest to Main Street are specially striped to be reserved for customers only. Residents of the Downtown SSD area are allowed to park overnight in a designated area in the northwesternmost portion of the Purnell Place lot, along Birch Street. Permitted vehicles are not allowed to park on Main Street or along side streets, except in very special circumstances. In a few cases, the permit holder has a disability and the SSD has allowed them to park on Main Street close to his or her business to avoid a full-time encumbrance of a handicapped parking spot.

As of this writing, the Town had issued 335 parking permits. Of that number, 329 were “commercial” and just six were “residential.” Of the commercial permits, a remarkable 175 were purchased by New Alliance Bank for its employees. An additional 30 permits were purchased by New Seasons adult day-care, and the approximately 125 remaining were divided among the many users and businesses along Main Street. The majority of businesses who hold permits only have one or two. As both the parking survey, discussions with Town and SSD staff, and direct knowledge of businesses on Main Street bear out, most businesses have many more employees or staff than they hold parking permits. A brief comparison of the permit-holder list with a business directory of users located between Birch Street and Maple Street illustrates this discrepancy. For example, a computer consulting company and a restaurant have just a single parking permit each. From direct experience with each business, each of these users may have at least 3-6 people working at any given time. Though it is possible that some employees may be part-time, it is highly unlikely that any employee of these (or of the many other businesses whose staff is under-represented by parking permits) are working two hours or less on a shift. It is clear that simply using the number 335 (or 329 commercial permits) to represent the potential peak employee/staff parking demand would be a significant underestimate.

Compounding this challenge is the fact that many businesses and residents do not acquire any permits at all. Another quick comparison of permit lists to business lists reveals several dozen business entities with no permits, including businesses such as consulting engineers, attorneys, retail establishments, cafes, doctors, counselors, and mortgage brokers. Certainly there are a number of private lots and privately-allocated spaces within easy walking distance of these Main Street businesses. The businesses within 945 Main Street, for instance, largely have their parking needs met by a private lot to the rear of that multi-unit building. For others, carpooling, walking, cycling, public transportation, etc. may provide potential explanations for the lack of permit acquisition. In all likelihood, however, the significant majority of the proprietors and employees of these businesses (and those under-permitted businesses described above) are attempting to “fly below the radar” of parking enforcement. They are either parking on-street or in municipal lots for more than two hours and hoping to avoid detection or possibly moving vehicles around periodically to avoid spending more than two hours in a single location. Discussions with the Parking Enforcement Officer indicate that each of these occurrences is fairly common.

Because of these uncertainties and willful avoidance of parking accountability, developing reliable numbers for parking demand simply from the employee/staff side is difficult. It appears that the largest several employers, including New Alliance Bank, New Seasons, and the medical and office professionals at 935 Main Street are largely accounted for. The larger number of businesses who have few or no parking permits also have somewhat smaller numbers of employees. Based on these assumptions and a review of the business lists, should all businesses in the Birch Street – Maple Street section of Downtown acquire parking permits for their peak number of employees, the permit number would be likely between 475-525 total permits. Current residential users without parking permits could easily add 15-20 to this number.

Utilization of Lots: Perhaps more important than attempting to estimate what percentage of Main Street-based employees have parking permits is an assessment of the availability of parking spaces for both employees and customers at peak demand times. Again, focusing primarily on the core of Downtown along Main Street from Birch Street to Maple Street, it appears there is a significant surplus of parking availability over demand for the normal peak parking time of weekdays between 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Based on discussions with the Parking Enforcement Officer, counts done as part of the Cross-key Architects study, and visual inspections done at times listed in the “Methodology” section of this report, average utilization estimates were made for each of the municipal parking areas. These estimates are as follows:



Customers parked in the lot at Purnell Place.

Municipal Parking Lot	Available Spaces	Percentage Utilization at Peak	Excess Supply
Purnell Place Lot	330	85 – 95%	16 spaces
Birch Street Lot	92	20 – 35%	60 spaces
Bissell Street Lot	22	50 – 60%	8 spaces
Pearl Street Lot	26	50 – 65%	9 spaces
Cottage Street Lot	55	15 – 20%	44 spaces
Forest Street Lot	116	30 – 35%	75 spaces
Heritage Lot	45	15 – 25%	33 spaces
St. James Lot	117	15 – 40% (non-church service peak)	70 spaces
Total	803	Total	315 spaces avail.

Simply using numbers of parking spaces available in each lot even at current peak utilization leaves well over 300 municipal parking spots that are generally only occupied under the most extreme of demand circumstances. Further, this estimate does not depend at all on numbers of parking permits assigned to various businesses. It is an actual visual estimate of demand, regardless if those using these spots are customers, employees, permitted or not.

Parking spaces on Main Street itself, particularly in the area between Pearl Street and Maple Street where parallel or angled on-street parking is prevalent, are periodically scarce, especially in comparison to a number of the municipal lots. Over the course of several visits and visual inspections of the Downtown area, parking spaces on Main Street itself were never less than 50% occupied, and were usually between 75-80% occupied. By the same token, however, never was there no spot to be found. The nature of the businesses along Main Street, combined with the posted time limits on parking, generally resulted in a high turnover rate that allows for new arrivals to find a parking spot either immediately or within one or two circuits around the block.

Put simply, there does not appear to be a current parking shortage in Downtown Manchester, or will there likely be one in the immediately foreseeable future. Part of the impetus of this study, however, and something echoed in the survey of businesses conducted as part of the study, is the clear perception that there is a shortage. Along with “Need Lower Parking Permit Prices” (36.8% of respondents), the two most frequently requested improvements for Downtown parking were “Need More Parking For Employees” (31.6%) and “Need More Parking for Customers/Clients” (44.7%). Based on the utilization numbers of the on-street spots and municipal parking lot spots as well as the location of the biggest generators of parking demand, it seems clear that a major part of the problem is “not all parking spots are created equal.”

A consensus of all information sources for this study is that the Purnell Place Lot is the lot of choice for most businesses in the core of Downtown Manchester. Fully half of those businesses surveyed indicated that Purnell Place was the lot of choice, and most of those surveyed (57.9%) indicated that it is frequently used by customers as well. For customers, only Main Street itself (81.6%) was a preferable parking location. It has a ‘perfect storm’ of attributes to recommend it including its size as the largest municipal lot, its location immediately behind the most heavily used section of Downtown, the physical sense of security because of the high level of activity and the built environment “shielding it” from surrounding properties. Because of these factors, Purnell Place is frequently near capacity (except for the sections of the lot to the northeast, closer to Birch Street) and provides the sense of being inadequate to parking demand. For customers, if Main Street spots are hard to come by and Purnell Place is near capacity (or at least the closer spots are taken), it is not surprising to receive complaints about parking availability. So in demand are the Purnell Place spots that the Parking Enforcement Officer focuses a disproportionate amount of his time monitoring this lot and issuing more citations for this lot while other lots and parking areas in the immediate vicinity are substantially underutilized.

The evident circumstance is that current parking demand does not exceed supply, except for Purnell Place. Even factoring for proposed growth in the Downtown core (34.2% of those surveyed anticipated increased business activity over the next two years), the overall supply of municipal and on-street parking should be more than adequate to handle peak demand. Should additional supply be needed, the solutions are relatively straightforward, and will be discussed below. The location of the available parking and the allocation of spaces to existing and future users, however, is the more substantial, and more pressing challenge.

CONCERNS AND GOALS

As is evident from the project background, the efficient functioning of readily-available parking capacity is critical to the success of Downtown Manchester. The ability for visitors and employees to experience the traditional Main Street setting of Manchester must not be crippled by the inaccessibility of parking spaces or pathways between parking and destinations. Further, as noted by the source of this project funding (Connecticut Main Street Center), the “Preservation of Place” is a central goal. Making additional parking available in Downtown Manchester by demolishing historic buildings or altering the unique character of the area would simply be counterproductive and potentially devastating to the traditional Main Street experience. Finally, finding solutions that balance the competing needs of customers, visitors, employees, residents, and business owners is of importance to maintaining and enhancing the vitality of Main Street.

In seeking recommended courses of action, several specific concerns are considered and were based on input from surveys and discussions with various stakeholders. These include:

- Having parking available in proximity to base of operations;
- Having safe, secure, and well-lit parking areas;
- Having adequate and well-marked pedestrian pathways from parking to destination;
- Having adequate, clearly-marked, and readily-available customer parking;
- Coordinating residential and commercial uses for shared parking;
- Coordinating parking management for snow-removal;
- Maintaining parking lots and parking enforcement with budgetary limitations;
- Planning for potential redevelopment of 1050 Main Street (Forest Street) lot; and
- Planning for uncertainty of renewing lease on St. James lot.

Parking Reallocation: Purnell Place lot and Main Street on-street spaces are now and will continue to be the most desirable parking spaces for the foreseeable future. Expansion in the Downtown core is likely to increase pressure for these areas, rather than naturally dispersing demand across all available municipal spaces. Given what was observed in current parking patterns, it appears that a substantial number of spaces both on Main Street and in the Purnell Place lot could be made available by relocation of existing users. This must be accomplished with a combination of incentives and penalties, or “carrots” and “sticks” to current users.

The map of central Downtown Manchester illustrates both the density of parking permits allocated to the businesses between Birch Street and Maple Street, and particularly from Purnell Place to Oak Street. The majority of users (both employees and customers) from this block prefer to park in Purnell Place or on Main Street itself. That these spots are preferred does not preclude other options from being promoted without drastic change to the ‘routines’ of customers or employees.

The map also includes a 500-foot radius zone drawn around this Purnell Place-to-Oak Street block to illustrate the actual proximity of most of the municipal parking areas to the center of parking demand. A 500-foot distance is less than 1/10 of a mile, and represents approximately a three-minute walk at very moderate pace. The Birch Street, Forest Street, St. James, Heritage, Bissell, and Cottage Street lots are all within this radius, depending on which end of the block is the destination. Each of those lots is significantly underutilized. Even a moderate shift of regular parking demand from Purnell Place and Main Street to each of these would substantially increase available parking for customers in these high-demand areas. The recommendations following are all suggested methods to encourage this shift, primarily for employees and business owners. The success of Main Street is generally about customer service. While it is important to accommodate the parking needs and sense of comfort for employees and business owners, the first consideration and the best, most convenient spots should be available for customers, visitors, and others operating within the two hour free parking window.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are not presented in order of priority and are not meant to be followed sequentially. They are, instead, meant to present the Town with a number of options and approaches that address different aspects of the parking conditions in Downtown Manchester.

Increase Parking Fines and Enforcement: Despite the presence of ordinances, signage, permits, a Parking Enforcement Officer, and a ticketing process, there is substantial noncompliance with parking rules. A large number of Main Street employees and business owners park for long periods (sometimes all day long) in on-street Main Street parking spaces. Aside from being in violation of parking ordinances, this removes prime parking spots from customer availability and damages the competitiveness and attractiveness of Downtown as a customer destination. The same is true from unpermitted vehicles (particularly employee and business-owner vehicles) who occupy prime spaces in Purnell Place lot.

The Parking Enforcement Officer does a good job in identifying, tracking, ticketing, and following up with violators. Many of these individuals are, unsurprisingly, frequent offenders, and many treat parking tickets as a minor nuisance or a game. For several, the chance of getting a \$10 or \$15 ticket occasionally (and either paying or ignoring the fine) makes more economic sense than getting a parking permit. The limited amount of time available to the Parking Enforcement Officer to work (because of budgetary limitations) means that this time should be spent to maximum impact. Parking fines should be significantly increased, particularly for repeat violators, which would primarily impact employees and business owners. The SSD should work closely with the Manchester Police Department in the aggressive collection of these fines, working to ensure that the Connecticut DMV is notified and there are real-life impacts to that vehicle owner. It has also been suggested that the Police could adjust procedures for collecting penalties from repeat offenders, by sending an “invoice” at the end of the month for violators

that have accumulated multiple tickets within a given period. This would force the payment issue in a shorter time-frame than vehicle-registration restrictions.

It should also be noted here that while parking permit fees go to support the SSD's operations, parking ticket fees do not. Parking fines are deposited into the Town's general fund. As the SSD's permit fees are inadequate to support the cost of parking lot maintenance, plowing, striping, and the Enforcement Officer's time (and in fact only cover about half of these costs), it is therefore recommended that the additional revenue generated by increased parking fines (above what was normally deposited with the Town) be allocated back to the SSD. This would allow the Town to provide additional support to the SSD without seeing a decrease in their own revenues from this source. It has been noted that this approach has been attempted in the past, with the Town rejecting the penalty-sharing arrangement, but that was several years ago. Given the potential enhancements that increased revenues would provide to the SSD, another attempt at this approach is warranted.

Increase Participation in Parking Permit Usage: As detailed above, a significant percentage of regular users of Downtown parking, including many business owners and employees, do not possess parking permits and it is thus believed to park illegally on a frequent basis. Pressure from the SSD and from business owners in compliance with parking permits should be brought to bear on those without parking permits. With wider compliance comes a better and more equitable distribution of costs to those businesses and users who park in municipal lots and thus create the need for costly maintenance and enforcement. This information and "permit enrollment" campaign should not only appeal to that sense of fairness for sharing costs for maintenance and security, but should also stress the increased enforcement severity and the direct damage that illegal parking (particularly long term on-street parking by business owners and employees) does to discourage customers from frequenting Downtown Manchester.

Transition to Lot-Specific Permits: As noted above, not all parking spots are equal in value, as demonstrated by the differences in utilization of each lot. From an economic standpoint, parking permits for these lots should have different values as well. From a management perspective, providing permits to park in specific lots will help the SSD monitor supply and demand, and will assist the Parking Enforcement Officer in maintaining security and consistency in each lot. An additional category of permit could be made available, at a premium, to allow the permit holder to park in any of the municipal lots.



a. *Increase Cost of High-Demand Parking:* This option is not likely to be well received by Downtown businesses and employees, 36.8% of those surveyed believed that parking permit prices ought to be lower. Parking, like most other consumer behavior, is governed by economic principles. Obviously, the current cost of parking permits

has not deterred over 330 users to purchase, and generally utilize permits in the Purnell Place lot. The existence of other, less congested parking areas, and even free parking areas (Cottage Street) has not resulted in decreased parking demand, particularly at Purnell Place. Increasing the cost of these “prime” spots will not only result in more revenues to the Special Services District, but will also assist in easing demand at Purnell Place and shifting it to less congested lots. The increase does not need to be dramatic, but a 20-25% increase would be expected to provide a noticeable shift.

It should also be noted here that substantial areas of the Purnell Place lot are actually underutilized. The areas to the north and east of the buildings in the Purnell Place lot itself are sparsely parked. These portions of the lot, extending to Birch Street, needn't be included in a permit cost increase, and may therefore be more attractive to Purnell Place lot regulars.

b. *Discount Low-Demand Parking Areas:*

The ‘carrot’ counterpart to the ‘stick’ of increasing the cost of high-demand parking lot permits is creating a financial incentive to park in less congested areas. Offering discounted rates or low-cost introductory rates for Heritage, Birch Street, Forest Street, and St. James lots will help throw permit purchasers’ decision into a more obvious contrast. If parking permit prices for high-demand parking would increase, holding the line on prices for other parking areas would be a more economical choice, and then would also allow for the SSD to increase needed revenue for maintenance of parking areas, as well as enhancements such

as lighting, sidewalks, and landscaping. Alternatively, if there was sufficient indication that reduced permit prices for low-demand areas would encourage significant increases in permit subscription numbers, this increased volume may justify more substantially discounted rates.



St. James parking lot can provide additional parking space when not being used for services or events.

Provide Incentives to Move Employee Parking: Because so many alternative parking areas are close to the Downtown core, it is possible that selection of parking spaces in a given, high-use lot (such as Purnell Place) is more habitual than an active daily choice. If behaviors are changed and repeated for several weeks or a few months, new habits form and the thought of parking in a different lot is less onerous and more familiar. If the SSD provided incentives to permit holders, such as a free three-month permit to the St. James, Heritage, Birch Street, or Forest Street lot.



Driveway from Heritage Lot lacks a clearly defined pedestrian access.

Designate Main Street On-Street Spaces as “Customer Parking”: Recognizing that on-street spots on Main Street are the first choice for customers, provide the most convenient access to businesses on Main Street, and allow for the quickest and most visible parking turnover, it is appropriate to more visibly demonstrate that these spots should be reserved for customers. In theory, this should already be the case, as there is already a two-hour limit for these spaces, and parking permits are valid for off-street parking only. In practice, of course, a large number of business owners and employees occupy these on-street spaces for many hours in excess of the allotted two. Ultimately, this does not change the enforcement circumstance, but the addition of physical signage to these spaces indicating clearly “Customer Parking” will change the perception of these areas both for customers and for business owners and employees. Customers will feel more welcomed and accommodated, and, it is hoped, business owners and employees will feel less comfortable parking in these spaces when confronted with a constant visual reminder of their transgression.

Consider Designating “Short-Term” Spaces: Recognizing that a number of businesses are ‘convenience based’ and attract very short turnover times, it is appropriate for these businesses to be interested in keeping available spaces most proximate to those destinations. Certain retail businesses such as a hardware store, convenience store, package store, florist, etc. turn over customers in 5-15 minute windows. Accordingly, designating one or two on-street spots at the ends of each block as “15 (or 30) Minute Parking Only” would provide that convenience for customers. Though the enforcement of these spaces becomes logistically difficult, especially

with a lone part-time enforcement officer, the visual impact of these designated spaces would tend to both increase customer satisfaction with parking options and to discourage longer-term occupancy of these spaces, particularly by employees or business owners.

Enhance and Establish Alternative Overnight Parking Areas: There is currently a single area for overnight parking for residents of the Downtown core, which is located in the northwest portion of the Purnell Place lot. This lot is not overburdened right now, as the relatively small number of residential units and the limited number of vehicles associated with those units has kept vehicle numbers low. As residential usage increases, a more formalized approach will be needed. During snowfalls, the SSD will need to be able to access this (and all) parking areas for plowing. An alternative location close by, perhaps either Birch Street or St. James lots could be allotted so that plowing could be accomplished and vehicles returned in an efficient way. Further, to encourage more market-rate and upscale residential development, enhancements to the sense of security for the residential parking area are recommended. Appropriate fencing, lighting, signage, and striping for this lot would be useful to achieving a sense of place and safety for these overnight parkers.



View of Purnell Street from Main.

Conduct “Walking Audit” With Parking Users: There are a number of pathways between parking areas and destinations that could be improved. Unsuitable pathways from Heritage and Cottage Street lots were noted below. Sidewalks extending along Purnell Place, Oak Street, Birch Street, and Maple Street can have a sparse, uncomfortable feel and are not well-lit. There are at least two cut-throughs from Purnell Place lot to Main Street that could be enhanced with lighting, signage, and maintenance. Pedestrian access from remote portions of Purnell Place lot to buildings along Main Street can be difficult to navigate and have no marked pathway. Crosswalks from Forest Street and St. James seem well-designed but the pedestrian crossing phase may be inadequate. Unsuitable lighting at several parking areas can create a unsafe feeling, especially in winter months when it is dark in the mid-afternoon. Improvements in lighting and signage, including adding whimsical painted footprints on the sidewalk, could increase the pedestrian friendliness of key walkways and corridors. These and other issues and approaches should be documented and specifically addressed by the SSD as part of an active “walking audit” of parking areas. The actual users of parking areas should accompany SSD and Town staff to assess and point out areas where enhancement is needed. This will allow the Town and SSD to prioritize improvements, and will empower both Town and users to feel better and take ownership of potential parking re-allocation and the increased use of underutilized parking areas.



Example of a friendly corridor for pedestrian traffic.

a. *Improve Pedestrian Pathway from Cottage Street:* As of now, Cottage Street is the only municipal parking area that is available for free full-day parking without permits. It is so underutilized that the Town considered redevelopment options as detailed in the Crosskey Architects study. It is ideal for overflow parking for training sessions for New Alliance Bank, but is less often actually used for either those events or for employees keen to save money on parking permits. Part of the reason for its continued underutilization is the slightly longer distance and uncomfortable pedestrian path from the lot to destinations. The buildings along Oak Street crowd the sidewalk and create a feeling of “pushing” the pedestrian toward the street and traffic. A slight widening of the sidewalk along this short stretch or the incorporation of lighting and plantings to create a comfortable, buffered corridor will improve the pedestrian experience. Crosswalk striping should also be added across Cottage Street at Oak Street. In addition, installing a visually-appropriate fence around the Cottage Street lot will improve the sense of security and enhance the sense of place.

b. *Improve Pedestrian Pathway from Heritage Lot:* This lot has many of the advantages of the Purnell Place lot in that it is a relatively sheltered lot behind busy buildings just a very short distance off of Main Street. The large number of vehicles parking in the private lot behind 945 Main Street also enhances the sense of ‘safety in numbers,’ though this municipal lot is underutilized. Part of the barrier to encouraging wider use is the lack of clear pedestrian path.

The driveway accessing this lot is wide, but is in some disrepair and has no sidewalk or designated walking path. Ideally, a sidewalk and lighting could be installed connecting the parking area with the sidewalks on Oak Street and a crosswalk striped in across Oak Street.

Consider Parking-Meter Kiosks on Main Street: If other steps are taken to improve parking utilization and management in the Downtown area, it is likely that perceived congestion and inadequate parking availability on Main Street will be reduced. In addition, there is likely to be significant resistance to the introduction of paid parking for customers and visitors on Main Street itself. Despite that, the maintenance of the Downtown area is a cost that can be reasonably expected to be shared by users, which includes visitors and customers, as is the case



in virtually all major central cities. If it is believed that the availability of free visitor parking (for two hours) is a major draw and competitive advantage for Downtown Manchester, then perhaps this is not an immediate action item. The use of kiosks (as opposed to meters for every 1-2 spots) would accomplish a number of objectives. It would limit the visual impact of parking meters on-street; an entire block of parking could be served by two small kiosks. It would provide better tracking and enforcement of parking rules and of customer turnover. It would substantially reduce the use of on-street spaces by business-owners and employees, and it would generate substantial revenues for the SSD, even at very modest rates of 25 ¢/hour.

A suggestion provided at one of the public input sessions to this report also included the consideration of adding parking-meter kiosks in parking lots, particularly Purnell Place Lot. These kiosks could be placed at the end of each row of parking. This option holds some potential, as it would then ensure that every car in the Purnell Place Lot would have either a full-time parking permit or a timed ticket indicating when the two hours has elapsed. The kiosks in the lot could be a very nominal fee- perhaps 25 or 50¢ for the duration of the two hours, with the benefit to the SSD being in the form of much easier enforcement.

Increase Parking Enforcement as Budgets Allow: Compliance with parking management approaches detailed above is only as good as their enforcement. The current Parking Enforcement Officer is a very reasonable and capable individual that has demonstrated compliance effectiveness. Unfortunately, the limited SSD budget available for parking issues places a rather low cap on available enforcement hours. This limit allows for many parking violators to ‘game’ the system and avoid enforcement actions by either avoiding notice or timing parking violations to coincide with the Officer’s absence. Several of the recommendations above would result in increased revenues to the SSD, and a further recommendation is therefore to allocate some of these revenues to expanding the Enforcement Officer’s hours or to adding an additional part-time Officer.

In addition to expanded parking enforcement, general safety and security monitoring could be expanded and provided, especially during evening hours in the late fall and winter. During these times, employees leaving work have expressed lower feelings of security making the journey to their vehicles. As other recommendations are implemented, particularly those that would create slightly longer distances between office and vehicle, having an official presence for security's sake would be welcomed. This could be accomplished either by the Parking Enforcement Officer or by a Manchester Police Officer assigned to patrol the Downtown area during this time.

Plan for Contingencies: The future of two municipal parking areas are somewhat uncertain, but for different reasons. The SSD leases access to the St. James lot, which is in the ownership of the Catholic Parish of the same name. The lease for this lot is set to expire within the next year, and though the relationship between the Parish and the SSD has been a positive one, there is no guarantee that the lease will be renewed. Though St. James is not currently a heavily-used lot, its loss will necessarily increase pressure on other lots. As policies encouraging the use of underutilized lots are rolled out, lots such as Cottage Street, Heritage, and Birch Street should be emphasized over St. James until the lease situation is resolved.

As mentioned earlier, the Crosskey Architects study included a set of plans for redeveloping the underutilized Forest Street (1050 Main Street) lot. This is the only parking area that directly fronts Main Street, and this potential, combined with the low rates of parking activity, make it an attractive redevelopment site. Adding attractive storefronts with office or residential units above would certainly enhance the vitality and sense of place on Main Street, though it would also reduce parking availability while also increasing demand. Similar to St. James, encouragement of expanded parking activity at the Forest Street lot should be delayed or tempered until plans are farther along.

Consider Costs and Character of Main Street During Expansion Planning: The major conclusion of this study is that current parking availability is more than adequate to current and projectable parking demand. Though management and allocation will continue to require significant attention, there is no immediate need to expand municipal parking in the Downtown core. At some point in the next decade, the Town and SSD may in fact wish to add parking, either in response to dramatically increased activity Downtown, or as a result of some increase combined with the loss of the use of St. James lot, Forest Street lot, or both. In one of these circumstances, there are two realistic courses of action for expanded parking: a) construction of a parking deck to create a second level of parking at Purnell Place; and b) expansion of the Purnell Place surface lot to the east by acquiring property along Cottage Street.

Adding a parking deck has the advantages of requiring no additional acquisition of property, the preservation of the overall character of Downtown by creating little visual disruption from Main Street, and the potential of allowing at-grade entrances to the upper levels of Main Street buildings, which is ideal for many residential units. The disadvantage of this approach is

primarily financial. Though a parking deck is cheaper than a full garage, structured parking is costly, with recent projects costing between \$15,000 - \$20,000 per space. Adding a deck over an acre of the Purnell Place lot could therefore cost between \$1.87 million and \$2.5 million for 125 extra spaces. The alternative is an acquisition of properties along Cottage Street and expansion eastward of the Purnell Place surface lot. This option would likely be cheaper, with the property acquisition costs plus surface paving being closer to \$500,000 for an acre's worth of parking (125 spaces). The removal of buildings has the potential of disrupting the sense of place in this portion of the Downtown area, but it is well-removed from the Main Street core both geographically and visually, which should limit much of this damage.

The removal of homes along Cottage Street, though less visible from Main Street, would have a substantially disrupting effect on that residential area, creating a more transitional neighborhood and the need to provide for landscaping, sidewalk treatments, and other hardscape improvements to help mitigate the visual impact of the addition of parking lots. In deciding which, if either course of action to add parking the Town will take, these factors will have to be weighed, along with other considerations such as increased impervious surface, stormwater management, facility maintenance, and the changing projections on Main Street usage and need. For the foreseeable future, however, these options for expansion may remain a matter for longer-term consideration and present no pressing point of decision.

CONCLUSION

Downtown Manchester is home to one of the most vibrant traditional Main Street areas in Connecticut. The rich history, strong architectural identity, and mix of active uses makes it one of the best examples of smart, walkable, compact growth and flexible economic development. Central to the continued success and further growth of Downtown Manchester is the availability of safe, convenient parking at reasonable cost. An analysis of current parking demand indicates that while congestion is prevalent in limited areas of Downtown, the overall supply is more than sufficient to handle current and projected parking demands. Encouraging and managing parking reallocation from high-demand lots and on-street areas to underutilized lots within the Downtown core will be the key to maintaining a high level of parking services to Downtown visitors and businesses.

APPENDICES

Central Downtown Manchester

Parking Permit Intensity and Available Parking Areas

Legend

Purnell Place Parking Permits

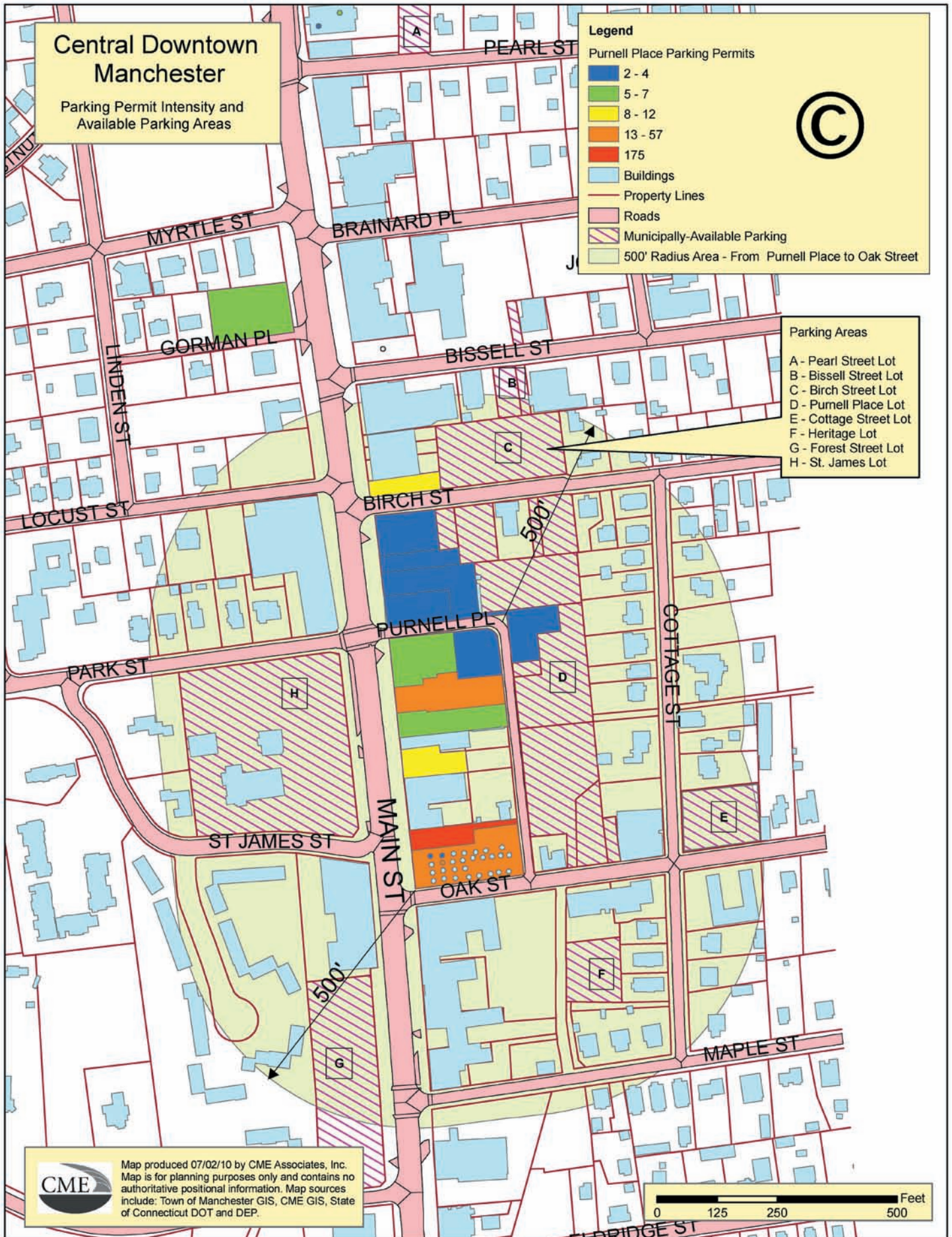
- 2 - 4
- 5 - 7
- 8 - 12
- 13 - 57
- 175

- Buildings
- Property Lines
- Roads
- Municipally-Available Parking
- 500' Radius Area - From Purnell Place to Oak Street



Parking Areas

- A - Pearl Street Lot
- B - Bissell Street Lot
- C - Birch Street Lot
- D - Purnell Place Lot
- E - Cottage Street Lot
- F - Heritage Lot
- G - Forest Street Lot
- H - St. James Lot













Map produced 07/02/10 by CME Associates, Inc.
Map is for planning purposes only and contains no
authoritative positional information. Map sources
include: Town of Manchester GIS, CME GIS, State
of Connecticut DOT and DEP.






0 125 250 500 Feet

Manchester Parking Survey



1. What is your primary use/business?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Medical office 	21.1%	8
Bank 	7.9%	3
Restaurant 	7.9%	3
Retail 	13.2%	5
Convenience/Package Store	0.0%	0
Legal/Insurance/Real Estate office 	13.2%	5
Other office (Financial, technology, etc) 	18.4%	7
Service Business (cobbler, locksmith, etc.) 	10.5%	4
Salon 	2.6%	1
Education/Public Service 	2.6%	1
Daycare 	2.6%	1
Residential (apartment/condo)	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		5
answered question		38
skipped question		0

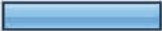




2. What is the largest number of employees/staff working at one time?

		Response Percent	Response Count
1-4		57.9%	22
5-10		18.4%	7
11-20		13.2%	5
21-50		2.6%	1
50+		7.9%	3
<i>answered question</i>			38
<i>skipped question</i>			0




3. How many customers/clients/visitors do you have at peak activity?

		Response Percent	Response Count
1-3		23.7%	9
4-6		15.8%	6
7-10		21.1%	8
11-20		18.4%	7
20+		21.1%	8
<i>answered question</i>			38
<i>skipped question</i>			0






4. How many downtown parking permits are held by your business (or residence) and its employees?

	Response Percent	Response Count
No Permits 	23.7%	9
1-5 	55.3%	21
6-10 	2.6%	1
10-20 	7.9%	3
20+ 	10.5%	4
<i>answered question</i>		38
<i>skipped question</i>		0

5. In the next 1-2 years, do you anticipate your business activity (number of staff and visitors) to increase, hold stable, or decrease?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Increase 	34.2%	13
Hold Stable 	63.2%	24
Decrease 	2.6%	1
<i>answered question</i>		38
<i>skipped question</i>		0






6. Where do employees (or residents) generally park? (choose as many as applicable, unless one location is predominant)

		Response Percent	Response Count
On Main Street		15.8%	6
Purnell Place Lot		50.0%	19
Heritage Lot		26.3%	10
Birch Street Lot		7.9%	3
Cottage Street Lot		15.8%	6
Forest Street Lot		7.9%	3
St. James Church Lot		13.2%	5
Pearl Street Lot		0.0%	0
On Side Streets		18.4%	7
answered question			38
skipped question			0






7. Where do clients/customers/visitors generally park? (select as many as applicable, unless one location is predominant)

		Response Percent	Response Count
On Main Street		81.6%	31
Purnell Place Lot		57.9%	22
Heritage Lot		15.8%	6
Birch Street Lot		7.9%	3
Cottage Street Lot		0.0%	0
Forest Street Lot		13.2%	5
St. James Church Lot		7.9%	3
Pearl Street Lot		0.0%	0
On Side Streets		15.8%	6
answered question			38
skipped question			0





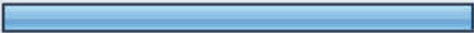




8. Counting both employees and customers, what is your peak time (when you generate the most parking demand)?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Weekdays (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.)		76.3%	29
Weekday Mornings (9 a.m. - Noon)		7.9%	3
Weekday Afternoons (Noon - 5 p.m.)		5.3%	2
Weekday Evenings (5 p.m. - 10 p.m.)		5.3%	2
Overnights		0.0%	0
Weekend Days (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.)		5.3%	2
Weekend Evenings (5 p.m. - 10 p.m.)		0.0%	0
answered question			38
skipped question			0











9. To your knowledge, have you, your employees, or customers ever been a party to or observed any of these? (responses are anonymous)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Parked 2+ hours in Lots without permit		42.1%	16
Parked 2+ hours on Main Street without permit		26.3%	10
Received parking ticket (owner/resident or employee)		55.3%	21
Received parking ticket (customer/client/visitor)		44.7%	17
None of the above		23.7%	9
answered question			38
skipped question			0

10. What are the most important features for parking areas? (choose as many as applicable)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Proximity to office/residence/shop		84.2%	32
Visibility from office/residence/shop		26.3%	10
Being on-street		18.4%	7
Being in a monitored lot		34.2%	13
Having a safe, maintained walkway from car to building		71.1%	27
Having a well-lit parking area		60.5%	23
Low or no cost		71.1%	27
Reserving prime spots for customers/visitors		47.4%	18
Reserving prime spots for employees		18.4%	7
Other (please specify)			5
answered question			38
skipped question			0

11. How do you feel that downtown parking needs to be improved? (choose as many answers as apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
No- Parking situation is generally OK		15.8%	6
Need More Parking for Employees		31.6%	12
Need More Parking for Customers/Clients		44.7%	17
Need Better Pathways/Pedestrian Corridors to Parking		21.1%	8
Need Better Enforcement		23.7%	9
Need Less Enforcement		5.3%	2
Need Higher Permit Prices		2.6%	1
Need Lower Permit Prices		36.8%	14
Need Higher Parking Fines		15.8%	6
Need Lower Parking Fines		5.3%	2
Other (please specify)			12
answered question			38
skipped question			0



Town of Manchester
Downtown Parking Study

2010