

Report of the Hallowell Parking Committee To the Hallowell City Council

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Committee Members: Billiann Dolby, Michael Frett, Kim Gleason, Raymond Hicks, Lynn Irish, Ruth Lachance, Frank O'Hara (chair), Richard Seymour, David Wood

Charge

The Hallowell Parking Committee was formed in January, 2016. Its charge from the Mayor was to come up with recommendations to address:

1. the short-term problems that will arise during the reconstruction of Water Street; and
2. the long-term problems of parking shortages during peak times on weekends and in the summer.

The committee has met monthly since February, 2016.

Findings:

1. **There is an obvious shortage of parking in downtown Hallowell.** By standard traffic handbook calculations, there is a shortage of several hundred parking spaces in the downtown area. Such calculations cannot be taken absolutely literally. The experience of store owners and residents and employees and residents and customers in the area is the primary indicator, and their experience is that – particularly in peak times on weekends and in the summer, and weekdays at lunch between 11 and 2 – parking is hard to find.
2. **Parking practices downtown do not represent the most efficient way to serve customers.** Right now, employees and tenants park for long periods on Water Street or in adjacent lots, making the spaces unavailable for high turnover customer use. Existing rules could be improved, and enforcement could also be improved.

With these findings in mind, the following are recommendations for parking in Hallowell.

A. Recommendations for permanent parking in the Water Street reconstruction plan

A1. Parking stall sizes should remain 18 feet in length, the present size.

MDOT is recommending that parking stall sizes be increased from 18 feet to 22 feet in length. This reduces the number of parking spaces along Water Street by about 10. We support continuing to make parking spaces 18 feet long.

We believe that this will present no new liability issues for the City. The Maine Municipal Association informed our manager, in his words:

If the DOT parking space standards are truly just recommendations, and if compliance by the City is not legally required, I think the Maine Tort Claims Act would protect the City from liability if someone is injured and tries to claim the injury was caused by the City's failure to comply with those DOT standards. If compliance with the standards is discretionary, 14 MRSA section 8104-B(3) provides immunity from liability for the City as an entity and 14 MRSA section 8111(1)(C) provides immunity for employees in relation to an injury that is allegedly caused by a discretionary act or failure to act.

A2. MDOT's new proposed safety setbacks from the crosswalks should be maintained, but motorcycles should be allowed to park in these spaces.

We do support MDOT's decision to provide 15-20 foot setbacks from crosswalks where parking is not allowed. But we also think that motorcycles should be allowed to park diagonally in these setback areas. This should present no visibility problem for either pedestrians or cars, because both drivers and pedestrians should be able to see over parked motorcycles. This practice is done in the City of Portland (see photo on right from Federal Street). For reasons raised in the point above, this should not create liability issues.



A3. Handicapped parking spaces should be spread throughout Water Street.

Federal and state rules require that one parking space in 25 be reserved for handicapped drivers. There are 103 parking spaces in the current design, which means that 4 must be designated for handicapped. We recommend:

- One at the north end of town in front of 100 Water Street (the red building);
- A "van-accessible" spot in the public parking lot at Central and Water Streets, next to Berry and Berry florists; or if this does not count for MDOT purposes, then on Water Street on front of that lot;
- two at the southern end of Water Street, one next to the Cotton Mill apartments (west side of street), and one next to Lucky Garden (east side of street)

A4. New signs should be installed that more clearly direct visitors and customers looking for parking spaces.

The signs should make it clear that parking is allowed for 2 hours on Water Street from Monday to Saturday, from 9 am to 5 pm¹. Signs should also direct cars to off-street parking options that provide longer parking time limits.

B. Recommendations for long-term parking arrangements for apartment residents

There are 76 apartment units on Water Street. Of these, 53 are on the east, or river, side. Most apartments on the east side of Water Street have permanent parking spots available on Front Street. However, the 23 apartments on the west side of Water Street do not, in general, have reserved parking. These residents park on the public streets and public parking lots for overnight and daytime parking. If they go on a trip, they generally leave their cars in the public lots, such as the one behind the fire station, or the one on Central Street. This is also a problem during winter storms, when both streets and parking lots need to be clear for snow removal.

B1. Residents in Hallowell who lack private parking spaces, and rely upon streets and public lots for their regular parking, should register and receive a permit from the City (for no more than two cars in one apartment).

The City should establish an annual fee for the permit, in order to cover municipal costs. The fee should be modest, and easy for tenants to afford. This permit would have a number of benefits:

- It would inform City officials about how many people will have to relocate their cars during storms, and will have a need for long-term parking during vacations;
- It would allow the City to set up a text alert system on snow shoveling days (see recommendation B2);
- It would enable the City to set up special parking lots reserved for residents' long-term parking; and
- It would enable the City to set up special exceptions for residents to some parking regulations, if necessary.

B2. The City should provide a text notification for residents with parking permits during winter storms about the upcoming plowing schedule, so that residents can rearrange their car parking accordingly.

This is done in many cities. It reduces the inconveniences for City staff and residents caused by phone calls, towing, etc.

¹ Note: The Committee discussed lengthening the basic limit on Water Street parking from 2 hours to 4 hours, but in the end decided not to. The 2-hour limit does not apply in the evenings or on Sundays.

B3. The City should make an arrangement with the owner of the upper PUC parking to make long-term parking available to residents.

The upper lot behind Camden Bank may be too far away for employee parking, but it is suitable for long-term (over 24 hour) resident parking. With such parking available, there would be no reason for anyone to park in a public lot near Water Street for over 24 hours (the current limit is 72 hours).

B4. The City should sign simple leases, on a voluntary basis, with private landowners who allow public parking on their property.

Currently, there are a number of informal arrangements whereby private owners make their private parking lots available to the public on nights and weekends. This provides the City and downtown business owners with a wonderful benefit at no cost.

The disadvantage of the informality, from the City side, is that the arrangement could end at any time, and the arrangement is not known to new customers coming downtown for the first time. From the owners' point of view, the disadvantage of the informality is that people can abuse their privileges, that there can be litter and other garbage left behind on Monday morning, and there is the potential for liability if there is an accident.

We recommend that the City develop contractual agreements (on a voluntary basis) with the owners of the upper-PUC lot and other landowners who provide a structure to public parking arrangements. Such contracts should address:

- The time periods when the private owner is willing to make parking available (and when it is not available);
- The willingness of the owner to allow public signage that makes new downtown visitors aware of the opportunity (and its limitations);
- The availability of liability insurance from the City to the landowners for the public parking arrangements;
- The availability of any other benefits that the City may choose to offer (on a case-by-case basis), such as assistance with snow plowing, clean-up, and the like.

C. Recommendations for employee parking

C1. The City should make an arrangement with the Antique Mall to provide employee parking at their back lot along Temple Street.

A number of businesses have employee parking spots already reserved for employees. For those businesses which do not, the City should explore creating parking for employees on Temple Street. This site is close enough to be a safe and accessible alternative for employees to walk to late at night. The spaces could be paid for through fees paid by participating businesses. Participating employees could be provided a special permit allowing parking in the lot.

For this arrangement to provide safety and security to employees, the Council should extend sidewalk improvements and lighting from the downtown to Temple Street, as part of the Water Street reconstruction project.

D. Recommendations for parking rules

D1. Maintain part-time staff to enforce parking rules

The inclusion of part-time support to the Police Department to monitor parking and give tickets was a positive step in 2016. We support continuing this effort in the future.

D2. No spaces downtown over 24 hours, once long-term parking is established

Currently cars are allowed to stay 72 hours in public parking lots adjacent to Water Street, as well as on Water Street from Winthrop to the railroad bridge. These are spaces that are better used for customers and employees. We recommend that parking in these lots be limited to 4 hours, from 8 to 5 pm on weekdays.

D3. Maintain 15 minute parking at existing locations on Water Street.

This is a continuation of the current practice.

E. Recommendations for expanded parking beyond the upper PUC lot (residents) and Temple Street (employees)

Using the standard metrics of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)², Water Street's businesses, stores, and apartments need approximately 500 parking spaces. There will be around 130 after the Water Street project.

In fact these standards are too strict. For 9 months of the year, and on most weekdays year round, parking in downtown Hallowell is manageable. However on weekends, on holidays, during the summer, and during lunch hours, parking can be problematical and discourage customers. Therefore, we support additional actions to increase parking in the downtown.

E1. Central Street

We support the idea of adding parking on Central Street, as part of a larger project that also takes care of the Dummer House and adds public amenities (seating, bathrooms). Some of these spaces might be leased to private businesses or apartment dwellers for long-term use.

E2. Temple Street

² Retail = 4 spaces per 1000 sf, Restaurant = 5.5 per 1000 sf, Office/commercial = 2.5 per 1000 sf, Apt Units = 1.6 per unit

We support adding 11 parking spaces on the southern end of downtown, on the east side of Water Street, just next to the boat landing. This will require Hallowell Council to make a request to MDOT for approval to paint in the parking spaces.

F. Recommendations for parking during the construction period

F1. Railroad right-of-way

We support a temporary arrangement to use the right-of-way along the railroad tracks, from Winthrop Street to Central Street, for one-way diagonal parking during the Water Street reconstruction period. This assumes that MDOT's engineers can assure that the walls are strong enough and the right-of-way wide enough for this purpose.

G. Recommendations for Special Vehicles

F1. RVs and Motor Homes

We recommend that RVS, motor homes, and buses be restricted to using the upper PUC parking lot.

F2. Bicycles

We recommend that the City provide bicycle racks at the Perley's Lane lot, in the proposed Central Street lot, and (with private owner agreement) in the open space next to Buddy's Restaurant.

F3. Motorcycles

Motorcycles should be allowed to park in any lot downtown, but should be required to park diagonally, and not parallel to the curb. In general, there should be room for two motorcycles in one parking lot. We also recommend, as above, that motorcycles be allowed to park next to pedestrian crossings, where cars are not allowed.