

Introduction

This report has been produced to fulfill requirements of the work scope for the City of Kirkland *Downtown Parking Study and Plan*. The study process and its ensuing recommendations were initiated by the City of Kirkland in association with a Parking Work Group comprised of representatives of retail and commercial businesses, residents, the development community, citizens and City staff. The consulting team of Melvin Mark Development Company (MMC) and Nelson/Nygaard Consulting (N/N) conducted the study.

A. THE ROLE OF PARKING IN DOWNTOWN

The role of parking in downtown cannot be seen as an end in and of itself. The key to a successful downtown is truly the land uses that comprise it. A vital downtown is an area that has a clear sense of place and identity, comprised of an exciting and attractive mix of uses and amenities. In a nutshell, "people do not come downtown to park." People come downtown to experience an environment that is unique, active and diverse. As such, the true role of parking is to assure that the desired vision for downtown is fully supported.

Parking is just one tool in a downtown's economic development toolbox. Parking must be managed to assure that priority land uses are supported with an effective and efficient system of access that caters to the needs of priority users. In the case of Kirkland, the priority user for the public system of parking has been identified as the patron of downtown, that person who shops, visits or recreates.

Over the course of this study, it became apparent that Kirkland is doing many things right in the area of parking. The Park Smart program provides a basis of parking management that both controls access and communicates priorities. The City has also taken a lead role in providing quality public access systems through effective management and enforcement of the current on-street parking supply and in the development of the Library Garage. The City has supported innovation in parking with valet programs and establishing partnership relationships with businesses that are reliant upon the public parking supply.

Kirkland begins with a strong base of knowledge; practices and vision that will both support and augment the development of a parking management plan. There is also a clear link to the *Kirkland Downtown Strategic Plan (DSP)*, which sets forth the primary recommendations of the Downtown Action Team (DAT) about the downtown and desired changes for Kirkland's central business area. Parking is a key element presented in the DSP. DSP considerations and recommendations for parking include:

- Successful retail requires an adequate supply of parking that is convenient and affordable.
- On street parking and nearby structured parking with good access are critical for retail success.
- Centralized, shared parking facilities will be more effective and efficient than requiring each facility to provide its own off-street parking.
- The City should play a leadership role in providing parking in the downtown that is consistent with these principles.

- Build a covered parking structure capped with a significant public plaza over the current surface parking lot adjacent to the waterfront.

The only element lacking in the present environment is a consensus blueprint for parking that will allow the City, stakeholders and the general community to leverage parking as a tool to facilitate the dynamic vision called for in the DSP.

B. STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to develop a workable parking and transportation management plan for the Downtown. The plan has been developed to be specific enough to address known parking and access constraints with immediate to near-term improvements. This will assure on going improvements in access opportunities for patrons, employees and residents of the downtown. The plan is also flexible enough to provide the City with mid and long-term solutions (and decision-making guidelines and triggers) to assure that parking management strategies and programs are implemented in a manner that best serves the unique and changing nature of the downtown business environment.

Key elements of the study work scope called for development of a parking management plan that is:

- Based on an accurate and objective understanding of the dynamics of downtown access;
- Correlated to a clear vision for downtown's economic development;
- Grounded in a set of Guiding and Operating Principles that provide a lasting framework for decision-making;
- Comprised of both near-term and on-going strategies for parking and transportation management that allows for flexibility and effective responses to the evolving access needs of the downtown.

This report documents the process and results of an extensive study effort carried out in partnership with the City of Kirkland and an active and representative Parking Work Group (PWG) of downtown stakeholders. The plan contained within this report will provide the City with the information necessary to adopt and implement a comprehensive strategic access management plan. This will equip the City with a useful and strategically coordinated "tool box" of strategies that will assure priority users are accommodated and priority land uses are fully supported.

C. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The consultant team participated with the City in a comprehensive education and involvement process that engaged key stakeholders, City staff, City Council members, Kirkland Downtown on the Lake (KDL), the Downtown Action Team (DAT) and the general public. The primary objective was to identify key issues regarding parking, transportation and access in the downtown and their impact on the continuing economic vitality of the downtown. From this dialogue, functional alternatives and strategies were developed to improve identified deficiencies or shortcomings and initiate a framework plan for the on-going management of, and planning for, access in the downtown.

The work leading up to completion of this study was conducted in concert with a Parking Work Group (PWG). The PWG was established to provide oversight, guidance and review of the study process. Key stakeholders, local business owners and operators, residents and downtown property owners and developers were directly engaged on the PWG. These individuals provided significant assistance in the identification, description, and prioritization of issues to be addressed. They were further instrumental in the development of strategies and plans necessary for implementation of the parking management plan that is a component of this document. The PWG met twelve times since initiation of the study in October 2002. A sub-group of the PWG met an additional two times in an effort to review issues regarding future development of new supply.

Presentations hosted by KDL were made to downtown property owners and merchants on two separate occasions during the course of the study. Advance notice of these meetings was broadly disseminated through KDL flyers, mailings, and newsletters. In addition, presentations were made to the DAT at their quarterly meetings. General findings, conclusions and recommendations were presented by the consultant team. These presentations also provided attendees the opportunity to comment and give input on elements of the plan. The City Council was briefed by the consultant team individually and at a June 2003 study session. The study session was broadcast to the community via the City's local access cable channel.

Overall, the high level of informed input and participation of stakeholders, the general public, City staff and City leadership reflects a deep-seated dedication and commitment to a vital and livable Downtown Kirkland.

D. SUMMARY

As stated above, Kirkland has done a good job in managing its parking assets to this point in time. What is lacking is a clear, flexible and consensus based blueprint for using parking management to support and facilitate the longer-term strategic vision. This plan provides that blueprint. It will serve as a guide to maximizing the City's existing parking resources and as a means to assure cost effective solutions for access, which includes new parking supply and transportation demand management programs and strategies.