

Parking Solutions Task Force* – Draft Report

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Introduction and background

Concerns about seasonal parking in the commercial downtown of Bar Harbor have been the subject of several advisory processes, including 2002 recommendations by the town's parking committee, recommendations of a 2004 Transportation Task Force, and a 2012 Economic Development Task Force.

In 2012, the Bar Harbor Town Council created the Back Yard Parking Advisory Committee to look at perceived congestion and parking problems in Bar Harbor, and to explore the possibility of a public-private partnership to construct a parking garage in the vicinity of the town-owned Back Yard Parking Lot, behind the Criterion Theater, between Main Street and Rodick Street.

The committee held a public meeting in May, 2012, gathering questions, suggestions and comment that led to a list of ten criteria should be met if such a project were to be successful (see Appendix B). At the same time, committee members felt they did not have the expertise to quantify parking needs, or to determine the size and financial feasibility for operating a parking garage.

The committee drafted a "request for proposals" that was issued by the Town and led, in June 2013, to a contract with Bermello Ajamil and Partners, including DESMAN Associates, for a four-phase study to look at the proposed site for a parking garage, to determine current and projected parking demand, and to determine the financial feasibility for constructing and operating a parking garage to address parking demand.

Bermello Ajamil and Partners submitted a report in November of 2014 covering the first three phases of work, and sought Town approval to proceed with financial modeling, which was authorized. Work on the financial modeling began in early 2015, and the consultants presented preliminary findings in a public "open house" in November of that year. After incorporating public comments, Bermello Ajamil and Partners submitted their final report to the town early in 2016.

Consultant's Report

<http://www.barharmoraine.gov/402/Parking-Garage-Presentations>

Consultant's FAQ's, and final recommendations:

<http://www.barharmoraine.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1767>

The integrated parking program outlined by the consultants included:

- Paid parking (meters) on Cottage, Main, Mount Desert and West Streets
- Paid parking (kiosks) in publically owned lots
- Permit parking on certain down-town streets and in residential areas
- Establishment of a parking fund, both to pay for early investments (improvements, parking meters/kiosks and enforcement) and to build a reserve for financing possible future capital expenditures for a parking garage.
- Later consideration of constructing a 412 bay parking garage (including 100 spaces paid for by Ocean Properties to accommodate West Street Hotel patrons and employees) constructed in the vicinity of the town owned Back Yard Parking Lot and land owned by Ocean Properties.

The Council asked members of the Back Yard Parking Advisory Committee to consider continuing their work as a task force to recommend how best to implement the recommendations outlined in the consultant's report. Some members agreed to continue, others applied, and the Council appointed a new Parking Solutions Task Force, which began meeting in August of 2016 and twice each month through the autumn.

Overall rationale for a parking program

Implementation of a parking program is part of an overall strategy to reduce traffic and congestion for the benefit of residents, business-owners, employees and visitors to the town of Bar Harbor.

Parking on public streets and in town-owned parking lots is a key asset to the quality of life and convenience of residents and visitors. It is also a public asset supporting all manner of commercial enterprise, assuring that customers find it convenient to shop or to visit firms providing services, and that employees are accommodated during working hours.

At one time, the zoning ordinances of the Town of Bar Harbor required that each application for new commercial construction or change of a property to a commercial use would require provision of off-street parking appropriate to the activity. As commercial business grew, so the theory went, commercially provided off-street parking would also grow.

Saying that the existing ordinances were stifling economic growth, business interests proposed eliminating the requirement for off-street parking for all businesses except lodging establishments. That change, adopted as part of the zoning ordinance in 2010, also allowed existing bed and breakfast establishments to operate without providing additional off-street parking, meaning some customers of bed and breakfasts parked on public streets.

Over the intervening years, the number of visitors to the town of Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park has grown. Some of those added visitors come by cruise ships and do not need parking. Some visitors pay for parking in privately owned lots. Other visitors stay in hotels or campgrounds, where off-street parking is provided.

Also in the intervening years, spurred by local, island-wide interest and Acadia National Park, and funded from sale of park visitor passes, town, state, federal and private sources, the ***Island Explorer*** bus system provides service for visitors and employees alike. Operated by Downeast Transportation, this “free to the rider” bus service connects from lodging and campgrounds, to the commercial center of Bar Harbor and destinations in the national park. It is estimated that use of the ***Island Explorer*** reduces parking demand in Bar Harbor by 250 spaces, as visitors leave their vehicles parked at hotels and campgrounds.

Over the years, free, on-street parking in the downtown sections of town have filled up in July, August and September. Based on projections of the parking studies in 2013 and 2014, as many as 100 cars were cruising the town in peak times of August and September, 2016, looking for parking spaces, finding them filled and therefore venturing further into residential sections of town to find parking. Employees are also taking full advantage of free on-street parking, moving their cars every two

hours to avoid tickets, or using streets where there is no time limit indicated. Both visitors and employees routinely exceed allowed times, as a \$15 fine is seen as an acceptable cost for parking. Many fines are routinely not paid.

Paying for parking may seem like a big change for Bar Harbor. However, most crowded towns and cities the world over, where seasonal tourism is an important component in the local economy, include paid parking as a way to relieve local property tax payers of some of the burden for providing services to growing numbers of visitors.

The rationale for paid parking, along with a corresponding permit system for employees and residents is an attempt to allocate among many users a scarce public resource. Using incentives and disincentives, paid on-street parking or in public parking lots would generally go to visitors, while employees and residents would make use of less expensive permits in areas outside of the commercial district.

It is not a forgone conclusion that the Town of Bar Harbor will construct a parking garage at the very heart of the commercial sector, but with the Back Yard lot, it does have that opportunity. Should the town decide to take that step in the future, the recommended parking program would provide the financial resources for doing so without cost to the property tax payers of the town.

Task Force Recommendations

Seasonal paid parking via kiosks in eight public parking lots and **204 meters on streets in the commercial districts**, including:

- along the length of Cottage Street (both sides, totaling 143 spaces),
- both sides of West Street to Holland Ave, then metered parking on North Side to Eden Street (employee permit parking on South Side of West Street from Holland to Eden Street) (totaling 92 metered spaces)
- along Main Street to Park Street, (both sides, and including RV Parking along the ball field, totaling 137 spaces) and
- along Mt. Desert Street, both sides in town, and on the right side of the street leaving town, from Kennebec Place to High Street, totaling 35 spaces
- along Firefly Lane (totaling 5 spaces)

Seasonal On- Street Permit parking for residents and employees on all other streets in the three Downtown Commercial zones, **including Roberts, Kennebec and High Streets**. **Based on public input, additional streets (Spring, School and Ledgelawn) may be considered for employee and resident permit parking. Non-resident business owners would be able to receive “employee” permits.**

Seasonal On-street Permit parking for “residents only” on all streets outside of the three Downtown Commercial Zones and those listed above

Designation of Free parking spots for 15 minutes at Post Office, Town Office or other key locations

Consideration of the “Ferry Terminal” as satellite lot for employee parking by permit, and negotiation for service by Island Explorer

Establishment of a Parking fund

A parking fund would cover the cost of equipment purchase, maintenance, enforcement and investment in facilities (including reserves for possible financing of a parking garage should the town decide such a facility is needed).

Similar to the Cruise Ship Fund, Council policy would outline the range of other possible expenditures from this fund, and relevant procedures.

The Town has drafted a proforma (projection) to estimate the amount of revenue and expenses for the proposed parking program. After paying for the cost of the meters and kiosks, and including the annual cost of enforcement, etc, the parking fund would grow by around \$500,000 per year.

Suggestions to improve success of proposed parking program

Education

Changes like those envisioned in the proposed parking program are difficult for residents, business owners, employees and visitors. A comprehensive education program to provide public sessions, backed up by good information on the town website will help. The Chamber of Commerce, the Hub of Bar Harbor and the Rotary Club could assist with public education.

Appropriate signage will help orient visitors, employees and residents to the new parking program.

Enforcement, Fines and Collection

With adequate staffing, funded by the parking program, the Town should be able to assure that the proposed parking program works effectively, freeing up on-street metered parking in the downtown commercial districts and public parking lots for visitors and customers, while providing access to other, non-metered spaces on adjacent streets and those in the residential areas of town.

A rule of thumb provided by DESMAN Associates suggests that fines be three times greater than the associated parking fee. If 8 hours of paid parking in premium areas is \$16, then the fines would appropriately be in the vicinity of \$50. Nothing says enforcement like towing. Seeing a car towed does wonders for the clarity to follow the ordinances.

Further steps for consideration (satellite parking, increased frequency of Island Explorer service along Route 3 and concurrent development of streetscapes, development of additional parking for employees)

The task force, like the consultants and the earlier advisory committee, heard from many stakeholders that they would like to see ***consideration of satellite parking*** areas for use by employees. By making these satellite lots “free”, with the other options having a defined cost, employees are more apt to use such lots, especially when there is access to the Island Explorer. Currently, 20% of Island Explorer riders are employees.

There are limited publically owned possibilities for “satellite lots” to be designated for employees. If the proposal for ownership or lease to the Town of Bar Harbor of the former ferry terminal goes through, that could serve as a satellite lot.

Should the Acadia Visitor Welcome Center in Trenton be completed, there would be an additional 350 free public spaces that could be used by visitors or employees, who then use the Island Explorer to travel to Bar Harbor. There are currently some 100 spaces available at the site of the Island Explorer bus maintenance facility on the Trenton site.

The current Acadia National Park visitor center has space for 280 vehicles. There has been informal conversation within Acadia staff of building an upper deck for that lot, potentially adding another 250 spaces served by the Island Explorer.

With additional funding from employers and the town of Bar Harbor, it might be possible for Downeast Transportation to add some express commuter runs serving those lots.

Increasing the frequency of bus service along Route 3, serving hotels and campgrounds could also slow the demand for in-town parking. If there are currently about 250 cars parked at hotels or campgrounds, and doubling the frequency of service results in a 30% increase in ridership, such an increase in service might forestall the need for 75 parking spaces in town Bar Harbor.

The current budget of \$2 million for the Island Explorer comes from a variety of sources, including from hotels with “front door” service, and from the Town of Bar Harbor. Downeast Transportation will increase the number of busses in service from 28 to 33 in the next several years. The town and local businesses could, conceivably, increase annual contributions to the Island Explorer to pay for increased frequency along Route 3.

But money isn't the necessarily the most critical barrier to expanded service. Downeast Transportation indicates that the current demand for qualified bus drivers exceeds the supply. Island Explorer service was curtailed earlier than planned in the fall of 2016 due to the lack of drivers.

Should there be interest and opportunity, the Town and local businesses could explore other opportunities for "satellite parking" with attendant cost of acquisition and improvement, leaving open the question of whether those expenditures come from property taxes, partnership with business or the parking fund.

Concurrent development of street-scapes will allow the town to assure that parking spaces, along with meters and kiosks, are laid out to provide maximum efficiency, convenience, safety and aesthetics. Current efforts to look at improving Cottage Street, and the work of the Aging-in-Place Task Force should result in priorities for the town's capital improvement program. In some rare instances, a case might be made for eliminating select on-street parking spaces to enhance other public benefit (handicapped access, aesthetics, etc.) The town should work with these collaborative planning efforts, in partnership with the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce, the Hub of Bar Harbor and others, to encourage appropriate alternatives to the use of private automobiles, including walking and biking, and supported by installation of bike-racks and shelters, benches, landscape plantings, lighting and other amenities.

Beyond establishment of an employee permit system in the commercial district, **development of additional parking for employees** could be undertaken in partnership with local businesses who most stand to benefit from providing such parking. Recalling that one of the over-riding concerns for a parking program is that such solutions not add to the property tax burden on residents and businesses, some form of public-private partnership is essential.

A suggestion was considered to make temporary use of the land occupied by the former town garage for employee parking. That property is in the Village Residential District, which does not allow parking lots. According to the town's planner, it would be an uphill battle to propose parking lots in that district.

Appendix A. DRAFT Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the seasonal time-frame envisioned for paid parking in Bar Harbor?
Based on current levels of congestion, paid parking would likely be set up and enforced, Mid May to October 31st 8 am to 8 pm, 7 days/wk
2. Will parking lot kiosks or meters take up a parking space. *It is not our intent to use a space for the kiosk. One parking meter can now service 2 spaces, so there will be less of them and they are more attractive than the coin meters of old. New meters and kiosks will accept credit cards, coins and Apple Pay, Google Wallet as well as discounted parking cards issued by the town.*
3. The B&B's are concerned about where their customers will park. They feel it will drive away business if their guests cannot park on the street. Even if they have off street parking, there would be the odd person who is not willing to give their keys to the Innkeeper. Can Roberts and potentially High Street, have different parking designation OR can B&B's be granted special hangtags for their guest? *B & B's by ordinance are supposed to provide parking for their guest, they should acquire/lease space to meet the ordinance requirements.*
4. People from out of town who visit an in-town resident will have no place to park, if the side streets are designated resident only. Where are family and friends of downtown residents supposed to park when visiting? Can in-town residents get special hangtags for non-residents? *It is anticipated that one permit per building plus one hang tag for guests would be issued to residents*
5. Will the price of the seasonal meters and lots be an additional burden to out of town residents to the point they will not want to come into town? *The parking fees will be no more of a burden than the many cities and towns across the country that have metered parking.*
6. Will Bar Harbor residents, who live out of the downtown, fill up the residential side streets so the people on the street won't have a place to park? How will we address this situation if it does happen? *A permit will be needed to park on many streets in the downtown area. As the program is implemented, it is understood that future adjustment may be necessary.*
7. What will be the price of residential and employee stickers? People already pay taxes; they shouldn't have to pay more. *The cost would cover the sticker and personnel time to issue it, perhaps \$10 per sticker. Many cities charge more. This price is equivalent to 5 hours at a parking meter on the town pier.*
8. Will residential parking sticker create a traffic back-up on the narrow residential side streets? *We don't anticipate that problem but the Task Force will monitor the program and recommend adjustments to the Council as needed.*

Commented [V1]: I was contacted by B&B owners on Roberts about parking spaces for those businesses which were granted business licenses for a B&B before the ordinance requiring parking was enacted. It has been suggested that TA-1's receive hangtags for as many rooms as they are licensed.

Commented [V2]: At a previous meeting, it was decided that resident stickers would be issued according to registration. If a car paid the excise tax and was registered in Bar Harbor, it would receive a sticker with its license plate number written on it. One registered car = one sticker.

9. Could there be a discounted seasonal parking card people could purchase? *Yes, the town could issue discounted pre-paid parking cards to residents and employees*
10. Will people be allowed to keep feeding the meters all day? *Although the goal is to have turnover of spaces, we have not decided yet against feeding the meter. If after implementation the turnover is too low, the town could make that change.*
11. What are the overnight restrictions at the meters and in the paid lots? *Per current ordinance, vehicles have to be moved in the lots every 72 hours yet.*
12. Will residential stickers be enforced overnight? *Residential permits would allow parking in those areas 24-hours per day... others may park in those areas without residential permits at night (8 pm to 8 am)*
13. Where will employees who have to work the late shift park, if resident parking areas end at 8 pm? *Neither permit or metered parking in force between 8 PM and 8 AM*
14. Satellite parking. Has it been thoroughly examined? Is the Ferry Terminal an option and if not, why not? *The Ferry Terminal may be an option but the Town does not own it yet, it is still owned by the Canadian Government. Current satellite lots are Hulls Cove visitor center and the Gateway Center in Trenton. Further conversation with Downeast Transportation could result in a limited number of “express” runs to serve employees from these free parking areas.*
15. Enforcement of permit parking – Will there be towing of cars in residential areas, so they don’t sit there all day? *Permits in residential areas would allow for full day and all night parking. By current ordinance, cars which are parked in one spot for more than 72 hours could be towed.*
16. How much will the tickets cost? *Parking tickets currently cost \$15 but recommendations by the consultants (Desman Associates) suggest that fine should be 3 times greater than the associated parking fees—If 8 hours of paid parking were \$16, then fines would be in the range of \$50 per violation.*
17. How can the town get out of the town people to pay their fines? What is the system for SWH or Florida residents to have to pay the parking tickets? *The town is looking at a more integrated software system to work with the parking ticket program so collection is less labor intensive. Unpaid tickets will be sent to a collection agency.*

Commented [V3]: This question referred to the idea that someone could leave their car on a residential side street for days with a ticket, but the spot would still be taken. If cars are not towed and required to pay for the towing, enforcement has no bite.

18. How will residential parking sticker be enforced? *By parking attendants (town employees).*
19. Will more and closer parking be available for people with disabilities? *There will be metered handicapped spaces available in all parking lots and 2 spaces on Cottage Street at the Criterion Theater and 2 at the Municipal Building.*
20. Alternative transportation options for people who leave their cars at their hotels. *The Island Explorer is increasing the total number of buses from 28 to 33 to meet the increased demand. The new multi-use lane on Rt. 3 will accommodate bikes and larger sidewalks will help with the flow of pedestrian traffic.*
21. Why shouldn't locals be allowed to park free anywhere in town? *The goal of the parking program is to have turnover of spaces throughout the day as well as get a return on a town asset (parking spaces) to pay for the program. Fees for parking might also reduce the number of cars in the downtown since there would now be an incentive to leave a vehicle at the hotel, home or in a lot. A discounted parking card would provide a benefit to residents and keep the spaces moving. The parking program is not paid for through property taxes. Some revenue could be used for improvements to the downtown parking areas that would normally have come from the property tax.*
22. Which parking lots will allow long-term parking? *No lots in the downtown area would provide long-term parking in the season (late May through October) Per current ordinance, cars may be towed after 72 hours (on street or in public lots)*
23. How much revenue will this program generate? *The town has developed a "pro forma" or projection of parking program income and expenses. After the meters and kiosks are paid off by year 2, the annual income, after all parking related expenses, is projected to be at least \$500,000 per year.*
24. Why aren't kiosks proposed throughout streets designated for paid parking? *The meters under consideration appear to have less impact on pedestrian flow on our narrow sidewalks and have less visual impact than kiosks.*

Commented [V4]: This was a question regarding follow-through, not tickets. The town code said that residential stickers are good for one year and will not be renewed until all outstanding parking fines are paid. This can really be combined with question 18, however.

Appendix B. Criteria for successful Parking Garage Project

*(Adopted by Back Yard Parking Advisory Committee
July 27 2012)*

1. Increase from current 50+ town parking spaces in current “back yard” lot
2. Provision in new parking facility for any on-street spaces lost
3. Provision in parking facility of all parking spaces required by Ocean Properties for “full occupancy” of West Street Hotel
4. Continued or improved access to all current easement holders /abutters with land adjacent to existing town ways at Lenox Place and Laurel Court
5. Improved pedestrian access to Main Street, Cottage Street and Rodick Street
6. Advancement of the Town’s long term interests (social, economic, environmental—including reduced automobile congestion and increased pedestrian amenities) in whatever agreement is made
7. Acceptable/Mutually Beneficial framework for public-private partnership **for construction** of parking facility and related amenities, including sharing costs
8. Acceptable/Mutually Beneficial framework for public-private partnership **to own and operate/maintain** parking facility, including sharing costs and revenues
9. Broad public support for project in preparation for Town Meeting to approve any land transfers (gifts, purchases or conveyances) or other necessary actions
10. Project construction, operation and maintenance will not add to the property tax burden for businesses and residents.”