

Parking Solutions Task Force

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Introduction

In 2016 the Bar Harbor Town Council appointed a Parking Solutions Task Force to implement recommendations outlined in a report by consultants Bermello Ajamil and Partners. PSTF appointees included members of the former Back Yard Parking Advisory Committee plus new appointees. The PSTF began meeting in August of 2016 and has met twice a month through the autumn and winter. It eliminated consideration of a parking garage and its recommendations do not call for further exploration of this option at this time.

Background

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

In 2012, the Bar Harbor Town Council created the Back Yard Parking Advisory Committee to look at 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 that led to the development of ten criteria that should be met if such a project were to be successful. Committee members did not have the expertise to quantify parking needs, or to determine the size and financial feasibility of a parking garage. There was feedback from the public that the entire parking issue should be part of a study beyond just a garage concept.

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, determine current and projected parking demand, determine the financial feasibility of constructing and operating a parking garage, and what other solutions could help improve the parking situation in Bar Harbor

Bermello Ajamil and Partners submitted a report in November of 2014 covering the first three phases of work. 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.barharbormaine.gov/402/Parking-Garage-Presentations>

Consultant's FAQ's, and final recommendations:

<http://www.barharbormaine.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 publicly owned lots
- Permit parking on certain down-town streets and in residential areas
- Establishment of a parking fund 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.
- Consideration of a public-private, 412 bay parking garage (100 spaces paid for by Ocean Properties for the West Street Hotel) constructed in the town-owned Back Yard Parking Lot.

NOTE: The public meetings indicated that the parking garage concept was leading to mixed opinions of the parking issue. As recommended by the parking consultant, and members of the public, the Parking Solutions Task Force agreed to eliminate consideration of a parking garage option and focus on the establishment of a paid and permit parking system that would improve the parking experience in Town.

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. The current parking regulations are loosely enforced at best. Many locals and employees have figured out ways around the time limits and will routinely occupy the most convenient spaces in Town for hours at time. This forces others to circle Town repeatedly while waiting for a space to open, park in the residential areas, or worst of all leave Town frustrated, vowing never to return.

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 and commercial enterprise, assuring that customers find it convenient to shop or to visit firms providing services, and that employees are accommodated during working hours in appropriate locations.

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, commercially provided off-street parking would also grow. In reality the only growth that provided parking was large hotel development. Most small businesses in Town did not have any option as there was no available land. These businesses were prevented from renovating, expanding, or otherwise improving their properties because of the parking requirements.

Arguing that existing ordinances were stifling economic growth. Business interests requested and the Planning Board proposed eliminating the requirement for off-street parking for all businesses except lodging establishments. That change was approved by the voters as part of zoning ordinance amendments in 2010.

Over the intervening years, the number of visitors to the town of Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park has grown. Some of those additional 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.

In 1999, spurred by island-wide and Acadia National Park interest and funded from the sale of park visitor passes and town, state, federal and private sources, the **Island Explorer** bus system was initiated to serve visitors and employees. 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.

Free, on-street parking in the downtown sections of town routinely fills up during the tourist season. Based on projections of the parking studies in 2013 and 2014, as many as 100 cars were circling the town unable to find parking, and venturing further into residential sections of town to park. 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. Both visitors and employees routinely exceed allowed times, as a \$20 fine is seen as an acceptable cost for parking. Many fines are routinely not paid.

The proposed Seasonal Parking Solutions program (mid May - mid October) will be a change for Bar Harbor. However, most towns and cities with traffic and parking congestion problems include paid parking as a way to relieve local property tax payers of some of the burden of providing services to growing numbers of visitors. We reviewed the policies of several other towns that have similar programs to the one we are recommending.

A paid parking system, along with a corresponding permit system for employees and residents, is an attempt to properly allocate a scarce public resource among many users. Paid parking on street or in public parking lots would generally go to shorter term users, while employees and residents would use free or lower cost permits in areas outside the commercial district for longer periods of time.

As stated previously, the Task Force does not recommend that the Town of Bar Harbor consider a parking garage in the commercial sector at this time. This Committee recommends the implementation of the Seasonal Parking Program outlined below, followed by several years of observation, data collection, and any necessary adjustments, before further steps are considered. It is anticipated that there will be a period of re-education with regards to current habits, operations, and policy adjustments after implementation. Once the parking behavioral patterns are established additional parking solutions could be considered. Should the town decide to take that step in the future, the proposed parking program would provide the financial resources for doing so without cost to the property tax payers.

Six Key Task Force Recommendations

1. Install 196 parking meters to serve 392 on-street parking spaces located on the following streets:
 - Cottage Street, both sides (143 spaces),
 - West Street to Holland Ave, both sides; metered parking on north side of West Street to Eden Street; employee permit parking on south side of West Street from Holland to Eden Street (92 metered spaces)
 - Main Street to Park Street, both sides, including RV Parking along the ball field, (137 spaces)
 - Mt. Desert Street, both sides, and on the right side of the street leaving town, from Kennebec Place to High Street, totaling 35 spaces
 - Firefly Lane (5 spaces)

2. Install kiosks to facilitate paid parking in approximately 380 spaces in the following public lots: Town Pier (100 minus fisherman), Harborview Park (6), Newport Drive (43), Casino Lot (17), Kid's Corner (30 +/-) , RV Parking on lower Main Street (?), Grant Park (44) , Back Yard (41) and Central Parking Lots (115).
3. Seasonal permit parking only from 9AM-8PM for Residents and permitted Employees on all other streets in the Downtown that are not recommended for meters. An inventory of these streets should be included in the amendments to Chapter 194 of the Town Code as the Seasonal Parking Solutions program is implemented.
4. **Provide Free, 15-minute parking spots** at Post Office, Town Office and other key municipal locations. Quantity and locations to be discussed.
5. **Designated "residents only" spaces-** Some on-street spaces and some spaces in the paid public lots should be reserved for residents who wish to park in Town for a short period of time for free. We recommend 5% of the on-street (20 spaces) and public parking lot inventory (20 spaces) be set aside for residents only, in locations to be determined through future public discussions. We received input from taxpayers who felt they should not have to pay to park on their streets and we agree. The amount of "resident only" spaces could be reviewed and adjusted annually.
6. **Establishment of a Parking fund-** The Municipal Parking Fund is a Town of Bar Harbor Special Revenue Fund to which all revenue from fees for the use of public lots, metered parking, permit fees and parking enforcement revenue is paid. The parking fund would cover the cost of equipment purchase, maintenance, enforcement.

A Parking Meter System will turn this key public asset (public parking) into a new revenue generator with funds residing in a special revenue fund. The revenue generated by this Program could fund future Parking Solutions, or other improvements. Examples of such improvements could be; Town infrastructure, such as sidewalks, LED streetlights, satellite lot purchase, upgrading existing streetscapes, bike friendly projects, providing expanded free shuttle service from satellite locations and reducing the property tax burden.

Transfers to the General Fund for direct cost reimbursements, equipment purchases (meters and kiosks), debt payments, the cost of administration and enforcement, and other expenses will be determined in the annual Municipal Parking Fund budget. Walking, biking and other quality of life amenities could be supported through the program.

After paying for the cost of the meters and kiosks, and including the annual cost of enforcement and other expenses, the parking fund should net an estimated \$500,000 per year.

Other Recommendations for implementing the proposed Parking Program:

a. Enforcement, Fines and Collection

The Seasonal Parking Program would be regulated by the Police Department. With adequate staffing, funded by the parking program, the proposal should work effectively,

Parking Solutions Task Force Draft Report and Recommendations for Seasonal Parking Program
freeing up on-street metered parking in the downtown commercial districts and public parking lots for visitors and customers, while providing access to permit parking on adjacent streets and in the residential areas.

DESMAN Associates advises that fines be three times greater than the associated parking fee. If 8 hours of paid parking in premium areas is \$16, fines would be approximately \$50. There will be a substantial learning curve once this program is implemented. We recommend a fine structure of \$20 for the first violation, \$35 for the second and \$50 after that. Any unpaid fines older than 30 days would increase to \$75, the minimum amount that a collection agency would accept. The process of issuing tickets and collecting the fines will involve several departments of the Town. We recommend this fine structure be further discussed and finalized between the Town Council and appropriate town departments. There should also be input from the public.

b. Times of Enforcement for metered and kiosk parking

The task force recommends the hours of enforcement for metered and kiosk parking be from 9 am until 8 pm, mid-May to mid-October.

c. Employee and Resident Parking Stickers

Parking stickers for residents and employees would be administered by town office staff (not the police department). Stickers would be permanently affixed to vehicles, numbered, and cross-referenced to the license plate number of the vehicle, name and address.

Free residential parking stickers

We recommend that all residents of Bar Harbor be issued one (per registered vehicle) free residential parking sticker at a time, and in a manner, that is convenient for Town staff and the residents. We expect the Council will need public and staff input to determine the most user friendly method.

Employee parking stickers

We recommend that any employees wishing to park on the designated streets need to be issued an employee parking permit. The fee for this seasonal permit should be \$30, which could be paid by the employer or directly by the employee. Employment verification, such as a pay stub or written request by the employer should be required. We think the data collected from this part of the program should be reviewed in detail at the end of the first season.

d. Contractor and service vehicles

As per current ordinance, contractors would be able to park in areas otherwise requiring a permit. We recommend section 194-28-B remain in the Town Code to accommodate service and delivery vehicles. *“Service and delivery vehicles excepted. Non-permitted vehicles stopped, standing or parked within 200 feet of a building for the purpose of making deliveries or providing services to a building located on a street or portion of a street described or specified in this section shall not be required to display the permit otherwise required herein”.*

e. Time-limits for meters and kiosks

In order to promote turn-over in the core commercial area of Bar Harbor, the task force recommends that metered parking within the following area is limited to two-hour parking: Cottage Street, West Street to Bridge Street, Main Street to Atlantic Avenue, and Mt. Desert Street to Roberts Avenue.

Parking at meters outside of that defined area and in public parking lots (kiosk) would have no time limit, while continuing the current stipulation that cars must be moved after 72 hours in public parking lots. We recommend this be reviewed annually and adjusted as needed.

f. Special daily parking permits for guests of residents

The task force recommends on-line issuance of one-day special parking permits, available in person at the town office or printable online, for guests with no alternative to on-street parking on all unmetered streets. We recommend that a running list of permits issued be reviewed by a parking enforcement officer in order to prevent abuse of this program.

g. Details regarding a form of special parking permit for grandfathered B&Bs and home businesses, including registered “weekly rentals”.

The task force recommends that the very few owners of B&Bs who were “grandfathered” (do not provide parking equivalent to the requirements of current ordinances) as well as owners of home businesses, including registered “weekly rentals,” may be issued special parking permits (hang-tags) based on application to the town Parking and Traffic Committee, and presentation of evidence of need (e.g. owner has no off street parking, or inadequate off street parking to accommodate guests).

The task force recommends the fee for these permits be \$750 per season, with replacements for lost hang-tags be available for \$100 per issuance. Each hang-tag would have a number and be referenced to the physical address of the applicant. Once approved the “special need” permits could be renewed annually

Further steps for consideration

Education-

A comprehensive education program, with public sessions backed up by good information on the town website will start the education process. The Chamber of Commerce, the Hub of Bar Harbor, the Rotary Club, and the business community could assist. We recommend an educational exhibit be developed that could be distributed by lodging establishments, campgrounds, Chamber etc that would inform visitors about this program. This could be in the form of a PDF or an app could be developed.

Signage-

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

The Parking Solutions Task Force should remain in place-

In consultation with relevant town personnel, the PSTF should review Program experience and recommend adjustments after the first year. Review would include the budget, operations, meter use and public feedback.

Satellite parking-

The concept of satellite parking has been a consistent proposal. “Free” satellite lots versus paid parking would be an incentive to employees, especially when there is access to the Island Explorer. Currently, 20% of Island Explorer riders are estimated to be “local,” with an estimated half that number being employees. There are currently **limited, publicly-owned possibilities for “satellite lots”** to be designated for employees. Some possibilities we discussed were:

- The **“Ferry Terminal”** should be one of those areas considered for “park and ride” service, depending on negotiations now in progress for that site.
- The **Acadia Gateway Center in Trenton**, if completed, would provide an additional 350 free “park and ride” spaces for visitors or employees.
- There are currently some 100 spaces available at the site of the **Island Explorer bus maintenance facility** on the Trenton site.
- Express bus commuter runs serving satellite lots would enhance their appeal by shortening commute time. Additional funds and drivers would be necessary.
- **Conners Emerson-** This would need coordination with school officials for discussion

All of these concepts would require capital investment.

Increasing the frequency of bus service along Route 3-

Increased bus service for hotels and campgrounds could 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.

The current budget of \$2 million for the Island Explorer comes from a variety of sources, including 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. Increased revenue could mean increased frequency along Route 3.

Money isn't the only barrier to expanded service. 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.

The Town and local businesses could explore other opportunities for “satellite parking” and 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 streetscapes-

This 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 select instances, a case might be made for eliminating certain on-street parking spaces to enhance other public benefits (handicapped access, aesthetics, etc.) The town should work with the Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce, the Hub of Bar Harbor and other groups to encourage

Parking Solutions Task Force Draft Report and Recommendations for Seasonal Parking Program alternatives to the use of private automobiles including walking and biking, 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. An overriding concern for the parking program is that solutions not add to the property tax burden, so some form of public-private partnership is essential.

We note that many of these future solutions will not be possible without the revenue generated by this program.

Several other issues were discussed. We feel the initial launch of this program should be as simplified as possible and these smaller issues should be reviewed if necessary in the future.

We recommend a review of the overall program after year one. If the feedback shows the demand the Town could include a discount card program. We feel this could also be addressed with an increase of "resident only" spaces or a reconfiguration of the meter and kiosk rates.

Appendix A. DRAFT Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What am I voting on in June?**

You will be voting to borrow \$400,000 to fund the purchase of meters and kiosks that can be used to improve Bar Harbor's parking problems. This report is the Task Force's recommendation to the Town Council on how this may be achieved. These recommendations will be reviewed, possibly amended, and finalized by the Council through the normal public process. The complete Task Force report is available at www.barharbormaine.gov.

2. **Why is the Task Force proposing this?**

To improve the parking experience in downtown Bar Harbor, increase turnover of downtown parking spaces for residents and guests, encourage walking, biking, carpools and use of Island Explorer. The shortage of parking in Bar Harbor has been a problem for many years. Gaining control of the public parking in the Downtown has been a goal of many committees for several decades.

3. **What will the parking system include?**

Meters on streets in center of town, kiosks in public parking lots, and resident/employee permits only in residential areas. Parking Solutions Task Force recommendations DO NOT INCLUDE A PARKING GARAGE. The Task Force will stay involved in the process as the final plan is formulated. Once implemented the Task Force will continue to work with the Town and evaluate the operation as well as feedback from the public.

4. **How much revenue will this generate?**

Annual estimated net revenue (beyond parking-related expenses): \$500,000. Revenue Years 1 and 2 will pay for the meters and kiosks. Considerable revenue will be available to fund all sorts of improvements which would otherwise require tax dollars.

5. **When will parking regulations be enforced?**

Mid May – Mid October 7 days/week, 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM. The rest of the year the parking meters will be removed.

6. **What are the time limits for meters and lots?**

Most spaces downtown will be limited to two hours. Other spaces and lots will allow all-day parking (see attached map).

7. **What are the overnight restrictions at meters and in paid lots?**

Same as the current ordinance: Vehicles may not be left anywhere for more than 72 hours.

8. **Why not use kiosks for on-street parking instead of meters?**

Meters have less visual impact and less impact on pedestrian flow. Kiosks are only effective when visible ("findable") from a large number of condensed spaces (parking lots or street parking without cross-street interruptions).

9. **What about Satellite Parking?**

The Task Force discussed many satellite parking ideas and recommends continued discussion in the future. Any satellite parking option has a cost and the revenue generated from this program could be used towards satellite parking locations and transportation.

10. **Is a parking garage part of this plan?**

The concept of a parking garage is not part of this plan.

11. **Who gets a "resident" sticker and where can it be used?**

Any resident of BH gets a free sticker for each vehicle registered in BH, including residents from outlying BH villages. "Resident" stickers can be used in the many streets designated as "resident and employee only" and in the "Resident Only" spaces located within the metered spaces and the public lots. (see map)

12. **Who gets an "employee" sticker and where can it be used?**

Any employee may show proof of employment and receive a permit for \$30 for the entire season. Any employer may also purchase permits for their employees. Employees may park on any of the streets designated "resident and employee only" (see map)

13. **What if I have friends coming to visit from another town during enforcement times?**
BH residents can get a free, visitor parking pass. Remember your "resident" sticker will allow you to park on street, and your visitors can park in your driveway.
14. **Will the sticker program increase parking in residential areas?**
By eliminating visitor parking in residential areas, no overall increase in parking in residential areas is anticipated.
15. **As a resident of BH, what's the bottom line for me?**
*Free downtown parking in many locations
Huge increase in available parking in the Summer months for residents
Future improvements NOT funded from property taxes*
16. **How will parking rules be enforced?**
Enforcement will be through the Police Dept, with additional parking personnel paid for through parking revenues.
17. **How much will a parking violation cost?**
\$20 for the first offense, \$35 for the second and \$50 for each one after.
18. **Will parking fees discourage tourists?**
Most tourists are accustomed to paying for parking and will appreciate the improved experience.
19. **What can the revenue generated by the Seasonal Parking Program be used for?**
Sidewalks, LED streetlights, satellite lot purchase, upgrading existing street-scapes, bike friendly projects, providing expanded free shuttle service from satellite locations and reducing the property tax burden.