

Staff Report

DOWNTOWN PARKING

October 16, 2018

BACKGROUND:

City Council has asked staff to respond to two referrals in regards to parking in the downtown area. One was to find what the scope, cost, and timing would be for a comprehensive parking study in the Downtown Business District and the other was to respond to a proposal to address employee parking needs in the Downtown. In addition, this report highlights the impact of the new parking meter rates by providing a comparison of downtown parking meter rates and revenues for the previous (FY 2017/18) and current (FY 2018/19) budget years.

ISSUE 1: COMPREHENSIVE PARKING STUDY:

As promised, Staff solicited information from consultants that specialize in parking studies. The intent was to obtain input about a possible utilization study of parking in an area generally bounded by Duff, Grand, 7th Street, and Lincoln Way. This study would encompass on and off-street parking for both private and public facilities.

A Comprehensive Parking Study:

Staff has learned that a consultant could be hired to perform a study that would define the existing and future parking supply and demand conditions and also locations where parking capacity is an issue. Future parking supply and demand will be shaped by development plans and will be layered onto projected growth of the Downtown area. Additionally, the study would identify alternatives for addressing parking challenges, including the optimization of existing parking resources to increase capacity and also appropriate locations to encourage and support developments. This would also include development of a financial plan that could be implemented as a method of funding future parking-related improvements, either entirely publicly financed or through public/private partnership.

Following from the work noted above, some additional tasks performed by the consultant could include: reviewing technologies that enhance the user-friendliness of parking, developing a plan aimed at improving existing parking policies and practices, and exploring means to reduce parking demand through alternatives to the single occupant vehicle.

This comprehensive study, therefore, could include the following seven tasks:

- Parking Supply/Demand Study (*Parking Utilization Observations and Analysis*)
- Parking Alternatives Analysis (*Existing and Future Parking Conditions, Needs, and Recommendations*)
- Review of Policies and Practices
 - *Review and Recommendations for Parking Management Strategies*
 - *Future Parking Regulations*
 - *Improved Parking Experience*
- Financial Plan (*Implementation Plan and Budget*)
- Report Development
- Public Presentations & Meetings
- Outreach & Stakeholder Meetings

Duration of this comprehensive approach to a study often ranges from three to six months or more depending on amount of public input desired, with tasks being performed concurrently. The costs of this study could cost up to \$125,000.

A Simplified Utilization and Alternatives Analysis:

Should City Council not wish to undertake a full, comprehensive study with the multiple phases noted above, a more simplified approach could be taken. This alternative would be to analyze the current demand, supply, and utilization of parking in downtown and proposed alternatives to meet identified unmet needs. A study of this nature would take four to five weeks to complete at a cost ranging up to \$40,000.

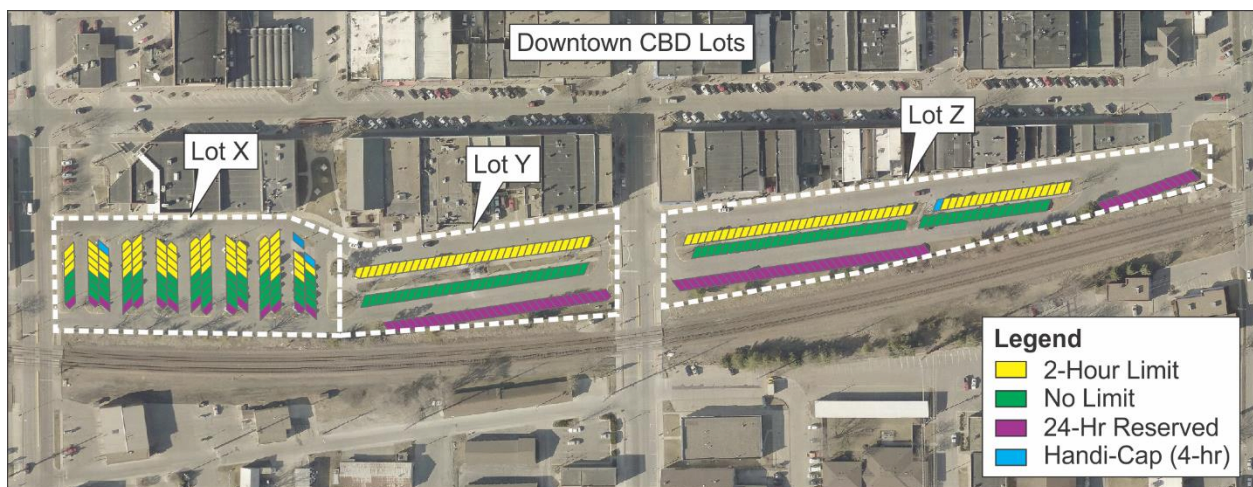
ISSUE 2: DOWNTOWN EMPLOYEE PARKING NEEDS:

In the parking lots south of Main Street and north of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, there is monthly reserved parking (\$50/month) and free public parking. The free public parking areas have a time limit of four hours before a vehicle must be moved. If employees are utilizing the free spaces and work between 8am – 5pm, they must move their vehicles at least twice per day. This has caused many employees to receive parking tickets if they cannot leave work to move their vehicle in time. Reserved spots

provide dedicated spaces to renters 24 hours a day – seven days per week. Because reserved stalls are used by Downtown employees, it is likely that many of these reserved spaces are empty during evenings and weekends when they could be used for additional customer parking.

Some Downtown business owners have expressed the need for more convenient parking options for employees so that they may park without needing to move their vehicles throughout the day. On June 19, 2018 the City Council referred a letter from the Ames Main Street organization requesting the City Council to consider changing the parking regulations in the Central Business District parking lots south of Main Street to better accommodate the long-term parking needs of Downtown employee parking. **On October 12, 2018 the Staff received the attached revised request from Eric Abrams, President of the Ames Main Street Board. The highlights of the request are as follows:**

- **Split Downtown CBD free lots into 2-hour and Unlimited/Reserved parking.** This option will provide the appropriate time for customers while encouraging turn-over of spaces adjacent to Downtown businesses (north side-yellow) by limiting those spaces to a 2-hour limit. Also, this change provides all-day parking for employees and residents adjacent to the railroad side of the lots (south side-green). **This proposal would maintain the \$50/month cost for the reserved parking stalls (purple) immediately north of the railroad tracks.**
- **Continue no parking between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m.** This provision provides off-demand time for maintenance and also prevents long-term parking. The 4 a.m. start to the prohibition also allows adequate time for late-night employees to finish their close-up duties.



STAFF COMMENTS:

Staff has been informed by the Ames Main Street officials that this proposal was developed by Downtown leadership from a survey they conducted with business owners throughout the district. They claim that the results of the survey showed near unanimous support, except for one business owner. Ames Main Street representatives indicated that between the time of the survey and the development of this report, they reached out to the one dissenting owner and now have gained the lone dissenter’s support.

It should be emphasized to the City Council that the staff has not verified that all business owners were contacted and are now in agreement with the proposed change. Therefore, the Council might want to make sure this was done before moving ahead with a final decision regarding any change in parking regulations in the CDB parking lots.

The City Council should also be aware of the fact that providing unlimited free parking in the green stalls might result in less reserved parking spaces being leased. This trend would result in a decrease in parking revenue necessitating further meter rate increases in the future. Therefore, a possible alternative to the Ames Main Street proposal would be to charge a monthly fee for the unlimited spaces (eg. \$20/month) by utilizing hang tags. A decision would then have to be made whether to allow four or two hour parking in the green areas for those who don’t purchase monthly hang tags. This hang tag revenue would offset the loss of reserved parking space revenue.

ISSUE 3: PARKING METER RATES AND REVENUE

As a reminder, the City Council approved the following parking meter rate changes that took effect on July 2, 2018. **The table below shows a comparison of the meter rates and revenue for the Downtown area for FY 2017/18 (previous rates) and FY 2018/19 (new increased rates).**

<u>Meter Location</u>	<u>2017/18</u>	<u>2018/19</u>	<u>% of Downtown</u>
Main Street (rate/hr.)	\$ 0.20	\$ 1.00	24.2%
Side Streets (rate/hr.)	\$ 0.20	\$ 0.75	52.2%
Parking Lots (rate/hr.)	\$ 0.20	\$ 0.50	23.6%

Downtown Meter Revenue \$155,777 (actual) \$554,200 (projected)

Under the tiered rate structure there was a weighted average increase to meters rates that is approximately 3.76 times the previous base rate of \$0.20/hour. The difference in

the estimated increases to revenue are unlikely to be equivalent due to numerous factors, including but not limited to; specific use per area (attractiveness of one block over another), type of payment method used, and the willingness of users to choose one tier of parking rates over another.



October 11, 2018

Dear Honorable Mayor John Haila and Ames City Council Members,

I am writing this letter on behalf of downtown Ames businesses to request a change in parking hours in the CBD lots X, Y, and Z, south of Main Street. Increased enforcement of these lots has caused an undue burden on downtown business owners and their employees. Currently, there is 2 hour and 4 hour parking in these lots. This requires employees and business owners to leave their jobs, often at the busiest time of the day, and move their cars.

We are requesting changing the 4 hour parking to unlimited parking, leaving the 2 hour parking unchanged, for customers and quick turnover. There would still be no parking between the hours of 4 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Making this change will not only benefit downtown businesses, we believe this will have a positive side effect of freeing up many of the reserved spaces in these lots which are now held by business owners, resulting in more public parking spaces. Many of the reserved spaces go empty much of the day. Having some of these spaces freed up, would be very beneficial to both businesses and visitors.

While making this small change will help business owners and downtown employees, we do not believe this is a permanent solution to the parking issues currently being experienced in the downtown district. Over the past 9 years, employment in the district has doubled. We believe this trend will continue, leading to further parking problems. With this in mind, we would still request the city invest in a comprehensive parking study to identify our current and future needs.

I appreciate your time and consideration to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Abrams', written in a cursive style.

Eric Abrams
Board President, 2018