

From a SUNY ESF 2006 Spring Semester project: *The Commercial Areas Component of the Syracuse Comprehensive Plan.*

## **Comprehensive Parking Strategy**

The development, maintenance and administration of parking must be made as efficient and consistent as possible for any city to successfully address this fundamental component of society, and more specifically this critical factor in economic development. In addition, serious consideration must be given to eliminating the detrimental physical impacts of ill-conceived, ill-maintained and poorly operated parking facilities. By instituting a comprehensive approach, municipalities can better match supply with demand, including accommodating both residential and commercial expansion, as well as adopt standards that will ensure safe, functional and aesthetically appropriate parking options.

In order to holistically and effectively address parking in Syracuse, the City must institute changes to existing policies and programs, as well as create new mechanisms based on national models that include:

- One agency with sole responsibility for the oversight of all parking within the city.
- A central database.
- A policy that supports multimodal transportation.

## **Parking Authority**

Municipal oversight of all parking within a community allows city government not only to acquire, hold and run public facilities, but also to manage overall parking supply, ensure efficient operation, promote adequate maintenance, and contribute to high quality physical development. A parking authority, an independent agency or organization, is the principal vehicle for carrying out these tasks. It can be established in concert with significant reform of existing zoning regulations, which are tied directly to local government policies and planning priorities. The responsibilities of a progressive parking authority for Syracuse will be most effective if incorporated into the existing authority established in 2003. This entity already possesses the ability to administer at least two parking garages within Downtown and therefore can be readily modified to assume expanded responsibilities and powers.

### **Responsibilities & Authority**

The Syracuse Parking Authority (SPA) will be responsible for all off-street public parking facilities and all on-street parking, and it will have the authority to administer rules and regulations pertaining to all private parking facilities within the city limits. A parking facility is defined as any built structure or improved lot, public or privately owned, that holds, houses or stores motor vehicles for a short or long period of time, with the exception of impound lots, heated storage facilities, residential driveways, and street parking on public roadways.

- **Public facilities**

The SPA will operate and/or manage, either with its own forces or through contractual agreement with a private entity, all publicly owned parking garages and lots; establish consistent rates based on market demand; and maintain consistent operating hours and signage for this network. It also will ensure that all public garages and lots meet established design guidelines, and will assume responsibility for inspections and code enforcement for such facilities.

Enforcement of all on-street parking regulations will be transferred to the SPA from the Syracuse Police Traffic Division, and will include rules related to metered and un-metered spaces, designated accessible spaces, and loading and delivery zones. Additionally, it will have the power to designate residential parking permit zones, and subsequently issue permits for and enforce the regulations for such areas.

- **Private facilities**

The SPA will have the authority to issue parking facility licenses for all private garages and all private lots that equal a capacity of 10 parking spaces or more. Licensure will be required for lots of 9 parking spaces or less which are contiguous to at least another parking lot of equal or greater size. Based on revisions to the Syracuse Zoning Rules and Regulations, all private parking facilities (except as noted above) will require review and approval by the SPA. Successful applicants will receive a parking facility license, which will allow the property to be used for parking purposes. The SPA will conduct inspections on a cyclical basis to enforce all applicable rules. Facilities that are found to be in violation will be put on notice and/or issued a fine (depending on the severity of the violation); failure to correct all inadequacies will result in the SPA license being revoked and use of the property for parking prohibited.

## **Data Base**

The SPA will establish an effective inventory system for tracking all on- and off-street parking, employing a more comprehensive application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software than currently used by most city agencies. Once a baseline is created, the SPA will update the data no less than every 2 years to ensure accuracy and maximize planning.

## **Policies**

The SPA will establish policies and develop an overall plan for parking within Syracuse, addressing general supply and demand, on-street parking, off-street facilities, design guidelines, special programs, multi-modal transportation options, and marketing.

## *Supply & Demand*

Given societal changes initiated in the post-World War II years, the number and use of private cars in the United States increased steadily, some might argue exponentially, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Syracuse like most mid-size American cities saw a move away from pedestrian activity and public transportation, and with that a shift in the local economy from the city to the surrounding suburbs. Various city administrations, local organizations, and property and business owners undertook often desperate measures in attempt to retain residents, employees, customers and clients. Their actions were responsible for, or tacitly supported, largely unchecked development of parking facilities—primarily surface lots—throughout the community. Today the success of such an approach is questionable in light of the relatively large parking supply actually available yet popular perception that parking generally is inadequate in almost every area of Syracuse.

Clearly, parking is a highly valued cultural commodity and it should be plentiful enough in any district to support residents and businesses alike; but where and how parking is provided must be carefully considered. To that end, SPA primary policies include:

- Eliminating land use/parking ratios in the Zoning Rules & Regulations that result in over-sized, under-utilized lots and/or are based on single season/single-use peak events.
- Incorporating sufficient flexibility in the Zoning Rules & Regulations to allow construction of less than required minimum numbers when a use is adequately served by public transportation and/or mixed use properties allow for shared parking, with “in-lieu-of parking” fees as an incentive for this type of development.
- Requiring all parking facilities are licensed by the SPA.
- Limiting the number of new stand-alone parking facilities inconsistent with the comprehensive parking strategy.
- Requiring all major institutions provide a parking plan as part of any proposed development.
- Redefining “temporary parking lots” to ensure a truly temporary condition.
- Establishing parking fees and fines at levels that significantly aid in meeting capital, operating, maintenance and enforcement costs.
- Establishing a *Parking Enterprise Fund* that combines revenue from all city-owned parking facilities and parking enforcement into a single fund to support all city parking programs and leads to financially self-sufficiency.

## *On-street parking*

The supply and management of on-street parking varies throughout Syracuse, but generally is perceived by most users as the parking option that should be most readily available to the public. In commercial areas, on-street parking is used primarily by customers and clients, although business owners and employees also place demand on available spaces. In addition, dedication of curbside locations for loading and deliveries eliminates some street area for parking.

To maximize on-street parking, and thereby in part reduce pressure to create new off-street parking facilities, SPA policies include:

- Implementing the use of angle parking on streets where traffic volumes and conditions will not be impeded.
- Striping on-street spaces in un-metered locations to improve parking efficiency and numbers.
- Re-evaluating loading and delivery zones in high trafficked commercial areas, and assigning under-utilized or ineffective zones to general purpose parking.
- Adjusting time limits and meter rates to maximize short-term rather than long-term use of on-street spaces.
- Installing new meters and/or pay stations, incorporating multiple payment options including coins, bills, pre-paid cards and credit/debit cards.
- Eliminating accessibility barriers for on-street parking.

### *Off-street facilities*

Parking garages and surface lots comprise the vast majority of parking facilities within Syracuse. Garages are located primarily within or near Downtown and major institutions, and commonly serve multiple properties as well as the general public. They vary in fee structure and hours of operation, and many include reserved spaces for particular customers. While different in architectural and structural design, parking garages typically are substantial in size, with some occupying an entire city block. Unlike parking lots, garages contribute to the sense of density so critical to an urban environment, although many detract from the public streetscape and pedestrian experience.

Parking lots are found throughout the city, with the greatest concentration in commercial areas rather than residential neighborhoods. These facilities differ widely in size, configuration, fee structure, and hours of operation; some are restricted to specific users, while others are open to the general public; and virtually all of them sufficiently decrease density to evoke an image of abandonment and disinvestment. Included in this category are “temporary” parking lots, properties intended to accommodate parking only for a limited time; in reality many of these lots have been in existence for decades. To improve off-street parking options, and concurrently enhance city character, SPA policies include:

- Establishing optimum ratios for short- and long-term parking in public facilities based on identified user base.
- Instituting coordinated fee structures, hours of operation, maintenance standards and advertising for all public facilities.
- Ensuring parking lot occupancy rates are no greater than 85% to accommodate higher turnover.
- Adopting criteria and processes for licensing all parking facilities, including criteria for inspections, enforcement and license renewal.
- Adopting criteria for the design and operation of all parking facilities, with particular attention to the relationship between the facility and abutting public sidewalks.

- Re-defining “temporary” parking lots to have a maximum 3-year life, with alternative but still effective design and operation requirements, and the option to become permanent lots under established license criteria and procedures.
- Developing incentives to encourage shared parking facilities in areas of high demand.

### *Parking Facility Design Guidelines*

The SPA will enforce a set of design guidelines for all parking facilities, with the primary goal to ensure the development of safe, efficient facilities that complement rather than detract from community character and, in particular, the pedestrian environment. They are based on the following definitions:

- Parking Facility: Any built structure or improved lot, public or privately owned, that holds, houses or stores motor vehicles for a short or long period of time, with the exception of impound lots, heated storage facilities, automobile dealerships, residential driveways, and street parking on public roadways.
- Permanent Surface Parking Lot: Any ground level lot intended as parking use for more than 3 years and which meets the prescribed design guidelines and operational requirements established by the SPA, and therefore is a licensed SPA facility.
- Temporary Surface Parking Lot: Any ground level lot intended as parking use for less than 3 years and which meets the prescribed design guidelines and operational requirements established by the SPA for such limited use.
- Parking Garage: A parking facility housed in a built structure, which is at least two stories high.

Parking facility guidelines will be incorporated into the revised Zoning Rules and Regulations as part of the Design Guidelines developed for the five business typologies identified within Syracuse: pedestrian-oriented, automobile-oriented, business cluster, former industrial, and suburban office complex. Each set of parking facility guidelines will present advice for permanent lots, temporary lots and garages. Location, size, screening, configuration and features will be addressed for both types of lots. The guidelines for garages will deal principally with location, as these features are addressed as “new construction” under the broader Design Guidelines. The parking facility guidelines for the Pedestrian-Oriented Development typology, presented here, can serve as a model for all other sets.

### *Pedestrian Oriented Development Parking Design Guidelines*

#### A. Permanent Surface Parking Lots

##### I. Location

1. Lots will be located within maximum footage of the primary property they serve, and within the same zoning district as this primary property.
  
2. Lots will not be located along the street front, except when size and/or configuration of the property prevents placing the lot at the side or rear. In such cases only one side can be contiguous to a street, and this side will contain the entrance/exit.

3. In no case will a lot abut the street front for an entire city block or occupy a corner property.

## II. Size

1. In no case will a lot occupy an entire city block.

2. Parking space allocation will follow the zoning code requirement, but in no case will lot size exceed the maximum percentage outlined in the code.

3. Corner properties that require off-street parking will develop no more than the allowed percentage of the lot, as prescribed in the zoning code, for surface parking.

## III. Screening

1. All boundaries of a parking lot will be screened with landscaping (trees, hedges, walls, or fences, or a combination of these elements). 100% of every side will be screened, with the exception of vehicular and pedestrian entrance/exit. Only one of these screening elements is required however.

2. Trees will be installed at 4.5" dbh and at least 14-16' high. Trees will be spaced based on the natural habit of the species selected, but generally at 35-40' intervals. When placed along a street frontage, they will alternate in their spacing with existing city street trees so as to maximize screening. Trees will be installed in a minimum 5' wide bed.

3. Shrubs used in hedges or mass plantings will be installed in beds no less than 5 ft. wide, and will be spaced based on the natural habit of the species selected but generally no more than spacing of 30 in. on center. Shrub plantings will be maintained at minimum of 48 in. in height, or a minimum of 24 in. when in conjunction with a wall or fence.

4. Walls will be 48 in. tall. If a wall segment exceeds 50' in length, wall breaks will be incorporated that will be 36-48" wide. If a seat wall is used, seating should be a minimum of 18" from the ground. Walls will be structurally sound, and designed and comprised of materials to compliment the surrounding context. If walls are used, a 5' minimum bed will be maintained.

5. Fences will be 48 in. tall. Fencing may not be plastic, chain linked, or topped with barbed wire, and will possess a certain amount of transparency.

6. The following tree and hedge species may not be used for any landscaping: Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), American sweet gum (fruit producing varieties only, *Liquidambar styraciflua*), ginkgo (female tree only, *Ginkgo biloba*), burning bush (*Euonymus alata*), Japanese barberry *Berberis thunbergii*, and hawthorn (thorn varieties only, *Crataegus sp.*).

7. The following tree species are recommended for use: eastern hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier sp.*), flowering crabapple (*Malus sp.*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), and honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*).

#### IV. Configuration & Features

1. Parking stalls will be no less than 9' x 18' and no greater than 10' x 20' in size.
2. Drive lanes will be no less than 10' in width.
3. Entry and exit width will be no less than 10' each.
4. When a minimum square footage of 30% of vehicular pavement area is of permeable paving, the landscaped island requirement shall be reduced by 25%.
5. A minimum of 30% of the parking lot will be paved with a material that is not asphalt or concrete. This part of the parking lot will be closest to the street. This percentage may or may not be the same amount of permeable paving called for in number 4.
6. Lot striping will demarcate stalls, drive lanes, and stopping stripes at exits.
7. Granite barrier curbing will be provided for all parking lot landscaping, as well as the 5' planting bed fronting the street.
8. Lots must have one landscaped island and one shade tree per certain amount of parking spaces (as per zoning code), or at least one interior side landscaped according to the screening guidelines provided in the previous section. This landscaped side must be different than the one contiguous to the street. If there is an adjoining parking lot, the side contiguous to the neighboring parking lot will be the landscaped side so as to provide screening between lots.
9. The size of an interior landscaped island should adhere to minimum footage in zoning code.
10. The following tree and hedge species may not be used for any landscaping: Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), American sweet gum (fruit producing varieties only, *Liquidambar styraciflua*), ginkgo (female tree only, *Ginkgo biloba*), burning bush (*Euonymus alata*), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), hawthorn (thorn varieties only, *Crataegus sp.*).
11. Dumpsters will be located at least 30' from the sidewalk. Dumpsters will be screened with fencing or vegetation that is higher than the dumpster itself.
12. An interior percentage of lot space should be provided for winter snow storage. This space will not be factored into the parking lot size maximum. Alternately, a certain amount of parking spaces may be relegated for snow storage.

13. Lighting will follow current zoning code for required candle power, and will be implemented so that light is directed and reflected away from adjacent properties and public ways.

## B. Temporary Parking Lots

### I. Location

1. Lots will be located within maximum footage of the primary property they serve, and within the same zoning district as this primary property.
2. Lots will not be located along the street front, except when size and/or configuration of the property prevents placing the lot at the side or rear. In such cases only one side can be contiguous to a street, and this side will contain the entrance/exit.
3. In no case will a lot abut the street front for an entire city block or occupy a corner property.

### II. Size

1. In no case will a lot occupy an entire city block.
2. Parking space allocation will follow the zoning code requirement, but in no case will lot size exceed the maximum percentage outlined in the code.

### III. Screening

1. All boundaries of a parking lot will be screened with landscaping (trees, hedges, walls, or fences, or a combination of these elements). 100% of every side will be screened, with the exception of vehicular and pedestrian entrance/exit. Only one of these screening elements is required however.
2. Trees will be installed at 4.5" dbh and at least 14-16' high. Trees will be spaced based on the natural habit of the species selected, but generally at 35-40' intervals. When placed along a street frontage, they will alternate in their spacing with existing city street trees so as to maximize screening. Trees will be installed in a minimum 5' wide bed.
3. Shrubs used in hedges or mass plantings will be installed in beds no less than 5 ft. wide, and will be spaced based on the natural habit of the species selected but generally no more than spacing of 30 in. on center. Shrub plantings will be maintained at minimum of 48 in. in height, or a minimum of 24 in. when in conjunction with a wall or fence.
4. Fences will be 48 in. tall. Fencing may not be plastic, chain linked, or topped with barbed wire, and will possess a certain amount of transparency.
5. The following tree and hedge species may not be used for any landscaping: Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), American sweet gum (fruit producing varieties



only, *Liquidambar styraciflua*), ginkgo (female tree only, *Ginkgo biloba*), burning bush (*Euonymus alata*), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), hawthorn (thorn varieties only, *Crataegus sp.*).

6. The following tree species are recommended for use: eastern hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier pp.*), glowering crabapple (*Malus sp.*), American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*).

#### IV. Configuration & Features

1. Parking stalls will be no less than 9' x 18' and no greater than 10' x 20' in size.

2. Drive lanes will be no less than 10' in width.

3. Entry and exit width will be no less than 10' each.

4. Parking lot will be paved.

5. Lot striping will demarcate stalls, drive lanes, and stopping stripes at exits.

6. The size of an interior landscaped island should adhere to minimum footage in zoning code.

7. The following tree and hedge species may not be used for any landscaping: Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), American sweet gum (fruit producing varieties only, *Liquidambar styraciflua*), ginkgo (female tree only, *Ginkgo biloba*), burning bush (*Euonymus alata*), Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), hawthorn (thorn varieties only, *Crataegus sp.*).

8. Dumpsters will be located at least 30' from the sidewalk. Dumpsters will be screened with fencing or vegetation that is higher than the dumpster itself.

9. An interior percentage of lot space should be provided for winter snow storage. This space will not be factored into the parking lot size maximum. Alternately, a certain amount of parking spaces may be relegated for snow storage.

10. Lighting will follow current zoning code for required candle power, and will be implemented so that light is directed and reflected away from adjacent properties and public ways.

#### C. Parking Garages

Garages will be located to avoid or limit building elevations that abut street frontage, with priority given to areas behind existing buildings and, in the case of new construction, below street level.

Garages that will abut street frontage will meet the following requirements:

1. Setback a distant equal or comparable to adjacent buildings.
2. Contain commercial space on the street level.
3. Compliment the character of adjacent buildings.
4. Appropriate landscaping will be present at the street level as per surface parking screening guidelines (except if retail is incorporated).
5. Incorporate ramping within the structure, rather than as a visible component of the building exterior. Structure ramping should occur within the interior where it is out of sight.

### *Special Programs*

Parking in Syracuse has been addressed through a combination of planned and happen-stance activities, which has led to marginal physical and economic results. The ever increasing demand for more parking—and that which is more convenient and more inexpensive—will place continued burden on community character and financial viability unless more creative measures are incorporated into a holistic handling of the issue. Among the strategies to be considered by the SPA are:

- **Shared Parking Program:** The combination of more flexible zoning regulations and incentives can be used to develop shared parking facilities in key commercial areas. Owners of strategically located properties can develop parking facilities able to meet not only their own needs but those of near-by properties and businesses, entering into binding agreements that establish responsibilities, authority, financial obligations, fee structure, and hours of operation. The participants can receive waivers from required parking provisions as long as the agreement is in effect and the facility meets SPA license requirements.
- **Residential Permit Parking Program:** Throughout the city there are commercial districts, particularly those based on evening and special events entertainment, that generate a parking demand great enough to negatively affect the on-street parking supply available to area residents. A Residential Parking Permit (RPP) program can help moderate these impacts, by prioritizing on-street spaces by location and pool of users. Through the issuance of permits in designated RPP areas, residents can be allotted the majority of spaces on streets that have no businesses, and a pro-rata number of spaces on streets that have a mix of both residential and commercial properties. Remaining spaces can be managed through meters or pay stations, favoring short-term customer parking over long-term users. For streets having a surplus of on-street daytime parking spaces consideration could be given to time-sensitive permits for area businesses, that is permits that expire at times more favorable to residents. Similarly, residents could be allowed to use their permits in SPA licensed parking facilities within the designated RPP area during those hours when area businesses have a lower parking demand.

- **Valet Parking:** Used in conjunction with the Shared Parking Program or independently, valet parking can provide businesses with greater flexibility in meeting customer and client parking needs. The SPA will issue valet permits to businesses demonstrating a need for the service and providing a plan identifying the involved properties and parking facilities. In addition, the SPA will designate an on-street drop-off area at or near participating businesses, which may include day and/or time use restrictions.
- **Validation Program:** The SPA will be responsible for overseeing the coordination of a program for educating business owners on the benefits of a validation program and how it would benefit shoppers and retailers alike. A validation program would provide discounted or free parking for those who are directly purchasing goods or utilizing certain businesses in an area.

### ***Multi-modal Transportation***

While the City must remain dedicated to ensuring high quality parking options are available to the public, time must also be dedicated to exploring alternative transportation methods. Options such as shuttle services can be used to link available parking facilities with popular trip destinations and decrease parking demand on a seasonal, cyclical or events basis. Regional ridesharing programs can help reduce day-time demand and traffic volumes in areas over-saturated by employee parkers. Similarly, commuting by bike can reduce intra-city commuting between many neighborhoods and both Downtown and University Hill institutions.

Regular assessment and evaluation of the Centro system, its routes, stops and rider amenities, will ensure maximum effectiveness of public transit in the city. Used in combination with SPA special programs and other transportation alternatives, Centro can continue to offer viable options to private car use and the need for high numbers of parking.

Through the SPA, the City can provide incentives to businesses and commercial enterprises that institute employee transportation support programs that prioritize alternatives to private car use. For example, minimum parking requirements for a business might be reduced on a pro-rata basis for the percentage of employees that use alternative transportation options. Exploration and implementation of these and other options can be supported through the *Parking Enterprise Fund*.

### ***Marketing***

The SPA will develop and manage a comprehensive marketing campaign for the citywide parking system. Information will be distributed on the local, regional and national level in the form of a web site, television and radio advertising, printed brochures, flyers and posters, and in special cases direct mail. Information will include an Online Parking Locator, to find the closest parking facility to specific destinations, printable maps, and instructions on how to use parking meters and pay stations or make secure on-line payment of parking violations. Lastly, the SPA will be responsible for the design and use of a coordinated signage system to be used on all SPA licensed facilities.