

DOWNTOWN MOBILE PARKING MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS

FINAL REPORT

June 25, 2007



The Downtown Parking Mission is to support economic development and a high quality of life for our residents by providing a downtown parking system that values each customer and provides a positive parking experience for all who visit the area.

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And
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I. INTRODUCTION / SCOPE OF WORK

The study team of Urban Place Consulting Group, Inc. and Downtown Parking & Planning Associates, LLC was requested to perform a Downtown Parking Management Analysis on behalf of the Downtown Mobile Alliance. The Alliance commissioned this work in an attempt to understand the current parking situation. As a part of the Alliance's work they conducted an e-mail parking survey of downtown users (see exhibit D for summary results). In that survey 58% of the respondents rated the downtown parking experience at less than acceptable with another 34% stating it was just acceptable. The current perception and reality of parking in downtown Mobile is acting as a barrier to the commercial and residential development in downtown.

The purpose of the study was threefold: 1) to identify parking issues and constraints that are serving as barriers to downtown development; 2) to develop recommendations for improvements that will remove those barriers; and 3) to facilitate the development of a final, workable plan with key staff and stakeholders.

Specifically, our scope of work included the following primary tasks:

- Evaluate the Parking System From a Management and Operations Perspective
- Observe and Provide Assessment of the Current On Street Parking Program
- Review Budget and Financial Information and Provide Assessment
- Review and Comment On Previously Completed Parking Supply and Demand Studies
- Perform a Comparable Cities' Parking System Analysis
- Develop Recommendations for Possible Improvements

Methodology

Our approach to this project started with a project kickoff meeting on February 7, 2007 in Mobile with the Downtown Mobile Alliance Parking and Transportation Committee. This group meeting included an overview of the study team's experiences with other downtown parking consulting assignments, and an open discussion to allow the group to provide comments and feedback to the study team. During our subsequent four day field visit the study team conducted

individual interviews with key staff, elected officials and downtown stakeholders. We also observed general field conditions over a multi-day time period and performed limited parking turnover analyses on Dauphin Street in an effort to document existing conditions and parking patterns on this prime, free parking area. To complete our analysis, we reviewed financial, statistical and contract information provided by the City’s Finance Department and by Central Parking. Aerial mapping was provided in electronic format by the City’s GIS Department.

II. MANAGEMENT / ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

Based upon our national experience with downtown parking systems, we have identified a list of eleven key attributes of successful parking operations. This list is not necessarily all inclusive, but does include what we believe are the most important elements of a successful parking operation. When we are asked to analyze the effectiveness of a particular downtown parking system, we rate it against these key attributes. A list of the key attributes and our “report card” for the Downtown Mobile Parking System is included below:

Key Attributes of a Successful Downtown Parking System

- Vertically Integrated Parking Management and Organizational Model
- Professional Staffing / Parking Leadership
- Strong Stakeholder/Board/Committee Governance and Oversight
- Well Established Financial/Budgetary Reporting
- Sound Cash Handling Procedures / Revenue Controls
- Linking On-street and Off-street Parking / Unified Parking “System”
- Investment in Newer Revenue Control & Enforcement Technologies
- Benchmarking and Proactive Planning
- Active and Consistent Parking Enforcement
- A Strong Focus on Customer Service
- Emphasis on Branding/Marketing/Public Relations/Communication

Downtown Mobile Parking Report Card

- Vertically Integrated Parking Management and Organizational Model (**Fail**)
- Professional Staffing / Parking Leadership (**Fail**)
- Strong Stakeholder/Board/Committee Governance and Oversight (**Fail**)
- Well Established Financial/Budgetary Reporting (**Fail**)
- Sound Cash Handling Procedures / Revenue Controls (Neutral)
- Linking On-street and Off-street Parking / Unified Parking “System” (**Fail**)
- Investment in Newer Revenue Control & Enforcement Technologies (**Pass**)
- Benchmarking and Proactive Planning (**Fail**)
- Active and Consistent Parking Enforcement (Neutral)
- A Strong Focus on Customer Service (**Fail**)
- Emphasis on Branding/Marketing/Public Relations/Communication (**Fail**)

Historically there has been no parking leadership or centralized planning & management structure to the Downtown Mobile parking system. Previous parking supply and demand studies have been performed, but no real public action has been undertaken as a result of those studies. While state enabling legislation allows for the creation of public parking authorities, the City of Mobile never exercised its right to create such an organization. The City staff person with the greatest amount of direct parking knowledge passed away in 2005, leaving behind a knowledge and responsibility vacuum. Among the remaining city staff responsible for parts of parking, there is confusion as to who is responsible for managing the Central Parking contract. A key element to successful downtown parking operations is the involvement of downtown stakeholders in the parking decision process. In Mobile there is no board or committee oversight, and no outreach to downtown stakeholders in the policy and decision making process. (Please see **Exhibit ‘A’ – Mobile Organizational Charts**).

As stated in the parking revenue analysis section of this report, we found the financial, revenue and budgetary reporting to be very confusing and fragmented. The numbers provided by the City did not match revenue figures provided by Central Parking. Staff were unable to explain discrepancies in the budgets from year to year. The format for budget and revenue reports was confusing and was not consistent from year to year.

We gave a “neutral” grade in cash handling and revenue control because we did not observe this area as part of our scope. Parking enforcement received a “neutral” grade because there is active enforcement, but it is selective and not consistent in regulating meter or free parking areas. A passing grade was given for parking equipment because Central is using modern electronic hand held ticket writing and tracking technology.

The remaining key attribute items all received failing grades:

- Linking On-street and Off-street Parking / Unified Parking “System” (**Fail**)
- Benchmarking and Proactive Planning (**Fail**)
- A Strong Focus on Customer Service (**Fail**)
- Emphasis on Branding/Marketing/Public Relations/Communication (**Fail**)

III. PARKING REVENUE ANALYSIS

The revenue analysis for this study was made particularly difficult due to the confusing and often conflicting financial information provided by the City and Central Parking. The difference in numbers was particularly confusing for Fiscal Year 2003, where the City reported net parking revenue of \$131,185 (compared to \$185,625 reported by Central Parking); and for Fiscal Year 2004, where the City reported net parking revenue of \$80,195 (compared to \$225,000 reported by Central Parking). Part of the difficulty was also due to the fact that we received financial information for *fiscal years* 2001 through 2004 versus *calendar years* 2005 and 2006. For the purpose of this study, we relied on the numbers provided by Central Parking for FY 2003 and FY 2004; and the figures shown for 2005 and 2006 are based upon calendar years. A graph of parking revenue history is demonstrated in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1

Revised Total Parking Revenues to City

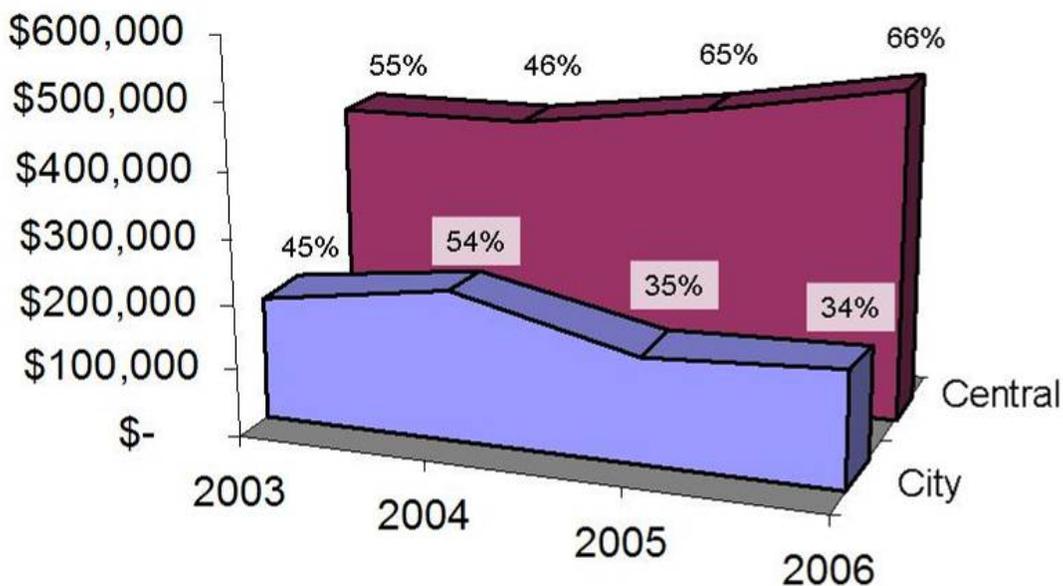


As **Figure 1** above clearly indicates, parking revenues to the City have dropped since the inception of the Central Parking on street contract in 2003. It should be acknowledged that the City no longer carries the expense of staffing and operating the on street program. Nonetheless, the chart demonstrates how net revenues to the City have continued to decline in recent years. The chart also demonstrates how net parking revenues to the City were affected by the contract amendment that went into effect in early 2005. When we compare the revenue “split” numbers between the City and Central Parking we can see that the contract amendment that took affect in early 2005 has resulted in less revenue to the City and more revenue to Central Parking. This revenue split history is shown in **Figure 2** below.

We believe the on street contract as currently structured is not in the best interest of the City or the Downtown. Since the contract amendment in 2005, Central Parking is effectively getting paid more to do less, as we discuss in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

Figure 2

Revenue Share – City vs. Central Parking



IV. PARKING VIOLATIONS / ENFORCEMENT ANALYSIS

As part of our analysis, we performed a detailed review of actual fine and enforcement activity over the past four years. This analysis has revealed some interesting recent trends that are not necessarily good for Downtown. As the charts and graphs in **Figures 3 - 8** demonstrate, expired meter and overtime enforcement activity has declined rather significantly over the past four years, while illegal parking and handicapped violations have risen sharply. For example, the average ticket “price” has nearly doubled since police personnel have taken over enforcement functions in 2005 – from an average of *\$23 to \$54.

**Source: Central Parking*

What this translates to on the ground is a situation that we have defined as “Convenient Enforcement”: there are no foot patrols; metered areas get second priority; free parking areas get last priority; enforcement personnel zero in on low effort/high cost violations; enforcement personnel are averaging the same revenue with fewer tickets written/less effort. This situation is resulting in frustration among downtown business owners and stakeholders who see the most valuable on street parking spaces being consumed all day by employees, coupled with predatory illegal parking ticket writing. We heard this as anecdotal information throughout our interviews, but we believe the actual statistics support this conclusion.

The lack of enforcement and abuse of the Dauphin Street 2 HR free parking area was confirmed during our field visit when we recorded 43% of vehicles parking four or more hours; and 27% of parked vehicles parking all day in the same spot. This represents nearly half of the total on street parking supply being consumed by storage parkers instead of customers and visitors. In a similar turnover analysis performed on Dauphin Street by Central Parking in March and November, 2006 they noted even greater abuse, with 69% of vehicles parked in excess of four hours. This kind of abuse ultimately serves as a detriment to the downtown experience and a potential barrier to downtown development.

Figure 3

Total Downtown Violations

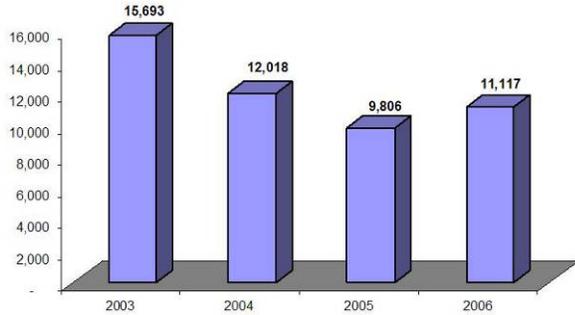


Figure 4

Overtime Parking Violations

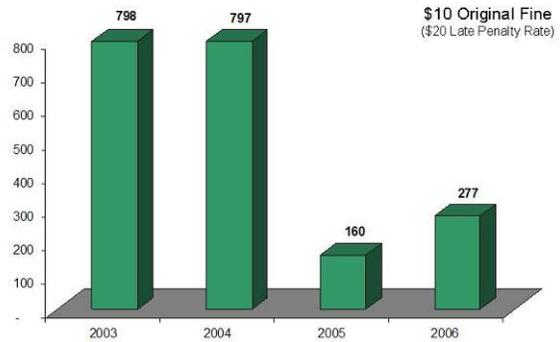


Figure 5

Expired Meter Violations

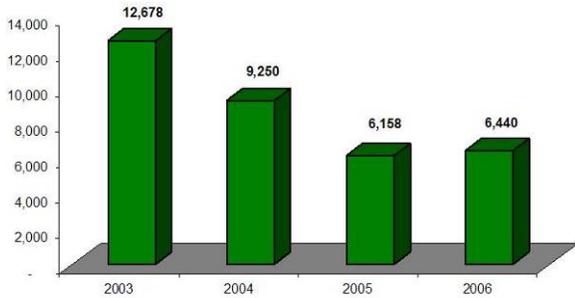


Figure 6

Illegal Parking Violations

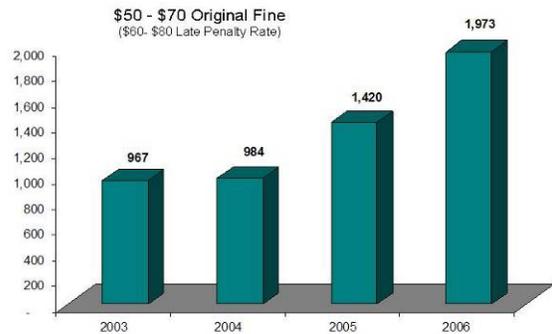


Figure 7

Handicapped Parking Violations

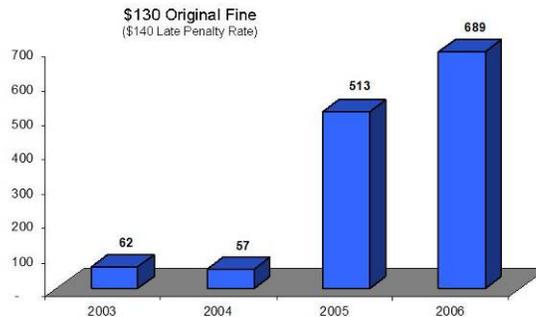
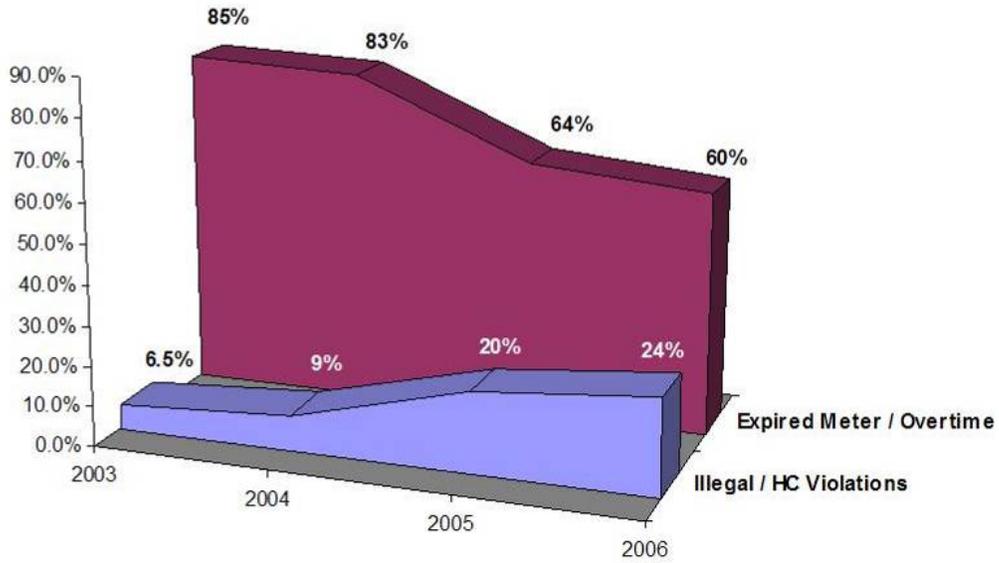


Figure 8

Percentage of Total Violations



V. CENTRAL PARKING CONTRACT

The contract to provide on street parking and enforcement services was approved by the City and became effective as of December of 2002. The original contract included private enforcement personnel that were employees of Central Parking. However, City leadership amended the Central Parking contract effective in early 2005 to change enforcement personnel from Central Parking employees to “Off Duty Police Officers”. Another significant change in the contract amended the compensation agreement between the two entities from an initial guarantee of \$225,000 annually to the City; to a new formula that gives 25% of the revenues up to \$325,000 to the City; plus 70% of revenue over \$325,000 to the City. The primary responsibilities of Central Parking, as stated in the current contract are to:

- Assist and Provide Consultation to City on its Parking Program
- Work With Downtown Businesses, Neighborhood Groups and Other Organizations as Needed
- Provide “Storefront” Office
- Provide Hardware and Software Support for Parking Enforcement Program
- Collect and Report on Parking Meter Revenues
- Install and Maintain Meters
- Handle All Customer Service Associated With Parking Program
- Provide Weekly, Monthly and Annual Reporting to City

Negative Aspects of Contract Amendment

The existing on street enforcement situation that was created by the 2005 contract amendment can only be described as dysfunctional. Front line enforcement personnel are technically under the direction of the Police Department, but they are paid by Central Parking, and their equipment is maintained by Central. Based upon our observations and interviews, it appears the enforcement personnel operate with very little internal policy direction or supervision; and the Central Parking local manager made it clear that he has absolutely no authority over the enforcement personnel. Police representatives also stated that they had little if any authority over enforcement personnel. The situation exists that no one claims to have the management

responsibility for the enforcement personnel and no one claims to set policy for the enforcement in downtown. Yet the enforcement personnel are managed and policy is set?

Currently the Police Officer stationed in Bienville Square has the responsibility for enforcement of the non metered area on Dauphin Street. When we asked why the enforcement personnel were not enforcing Dauphin Street the only answer we heard was that they didn't want to put in the extra effort to enforce an area without meters. We've heard anecdotal evidence that ticket writers are rude and abrasive. Simply put, there is no customer service focus or aspect to the parking program at all; and there is little to no control being exercised over front line enforcement personnel.

The second major downside to the contract amendment is financial. The original contract included an annual guarantee of \$225,000 to the City, regardless of total gross receipts. The amended contract only provides 25% of revenues to the City for the first \$325,000; plus 70% of gross receipts over \$325,000 annually. Based upon the formula, the City received \$161,645 in 2005; and \$174,964 in 2006 (as opposed to a guarantee of \$225,000). We never advocate revenue generation as the primary focus of any parking enforcement program. However, by agreeing to the contract amendment, the City effectively relieved Central Parking of a fundamental component of the original program; AND increased their compensation in process.

Other Negative Issues / Recap

- Contract is Entirely Revenue Based and Not Customer Focused
- Contract Heavily Favors Contractor
- Amendment Reduced Revenues AND Increased Costs to the City
- Operational Confusion / Dysfunction
- Lack of Top Level Management Accountability
- Loss of Front Line Accountability
- Very Little Detail on Policy or Operational Requirements
- No Customer Service Standards, Goals or Requirements
- Arbitrary / Predatory Enforcement
- Abuse of Prime On Street Free Parking Areas
- Poor Experience / Perceptions of Downtown

VI. PARKING SUPPLY & DEMAND

Parking Demand

One of our requested tasks in this parking analysis was to review the 2002 parking supply and demand study performed by Walker Parking Consultants. The main purpose of the review was to determine if the 2002 assumptions regarding new development activity were still valid, and to spot check the 2002 assumptions against actual development activity. At the time, the Walker study anticipated the following developments in estimating future demand:

- 600,000 Sq/Ft RSA Office Tower
- Battlehouse Hotel Renovation (228 Rooms)
- New 305,000 Sq/Ft GSA Building
- Renovated GM&O Terminal Building
- New Press Register Complex
- Possible Expansion of Radisson Hotel
- New Mobile Maritime Transportation Center

Based upon this anticipated development scenario, the Walker study came up with the parking supply & demand projections by sub-area as shown on the aerial map below.

Figure 9



As you can see in **Figure 9**, the 2002 study estimated there would be rather significant parking deficits at the convention center sub-area, and in the sub-areas to the north of the new RSA tower. The 2002 study showed a parking “surplus” of 604 spaces in the area immediately surrounding the new RSA Tower. While we do not question the 2002 projections developed by Walker, we do believe the situation on the ground today is not the same as projected in 2002. The following factors were not known or realized in 2002:

- Size of Final Tower Design
- Mix of Uses Within RSA Tower (Shared or Competing Demand)
- Long Term Lease of Entire Municipal Garage to RSA
- Amount of On Site Structured Parking for RSA Tower
- Actual Activity Level of Convention Center
- Loss of Surface Parking for New Development
- New Hampton Inn Hotel
- Potential Development Site Immediately West of RSA Tower

One aspect of the 2002 study that we believe may be impacting the ability to accurately predict parking demand is the way in which the parking study sub-areas were delineated. As shown below in **Figure 10**, the Walker study sub-areas were based upon an earlier study. The issue we see now is that these small sub-areas are fragmented and converge in a larger sub-area that is the center of new development activity. Basically, we believe the net needs to be cast wider to determine true parking demand in the larger sub-area. The new sub-area should include the convention center; the new RSA Tower; the renovated Riverview Hotel; the site of the new Hampton Inn and possibly the CSX railroad site. This current development “hot spot” area is shown in **Figure 11**.

Considering what has changed since 2002, the factors not known at the time, and the need to look at the larger development hot spot area, we believe it may be necessary to perform an updated parking impact study to more accurately determine current and future demand. Based upon our field observations, we believe the current parking adequacy may not be sufficient to accommodate current and/or pipeline development projects.

Figure 10
Walker Study Sub Areas

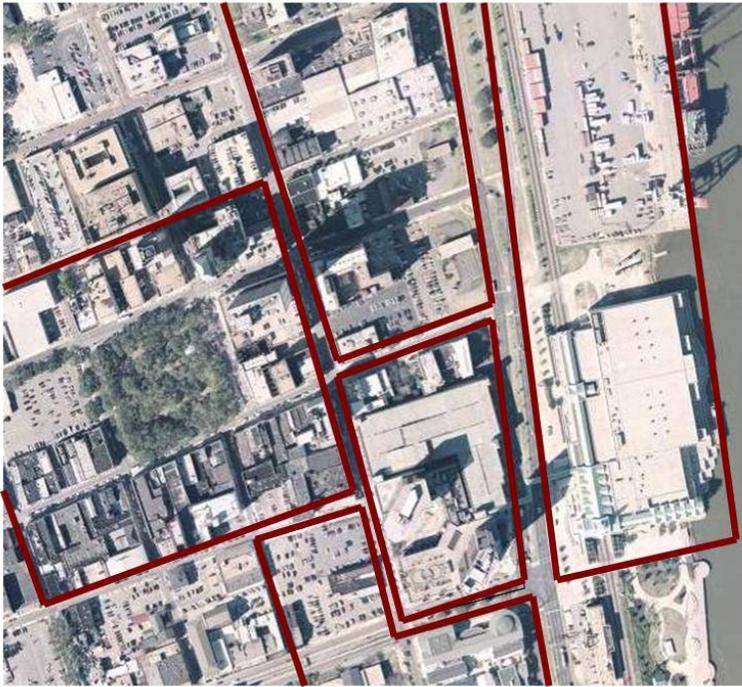
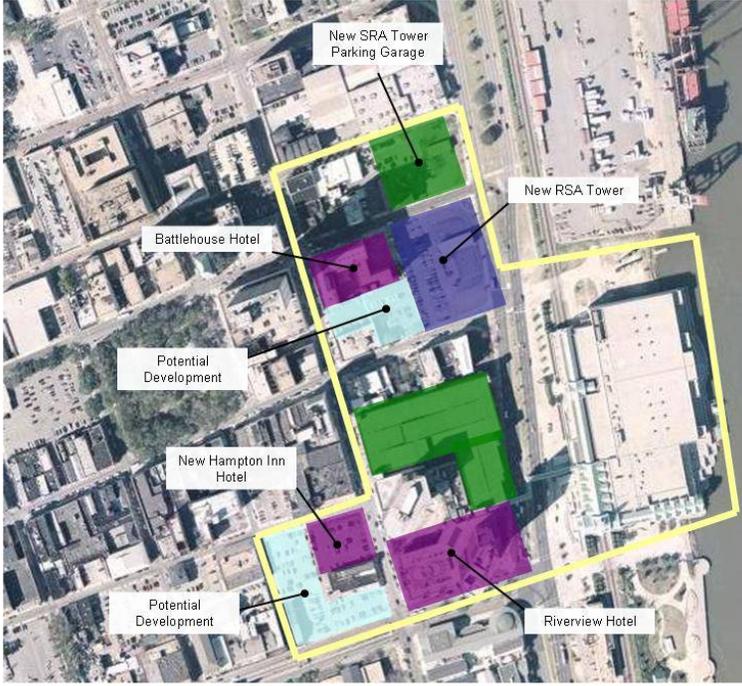


Figure 11
Current Development “Hot Spot” Area



Condition of Existing Surface Lots

One issue/constraint that stands out regarding the downtown Mobile parking system is the amount of, and the condition of existing surface parking lots. A number of lots are located within very short walking distances of prime destinations, but they remain underutilized throughout typical daytime activity periods. Most lots are utilized for monthly parking and are not well utilized by visitors, shoppers or short term parkers. We believe the underutilization of these lots is partially due to their poor physical condition and a lack of proper wayfinding and identification signage. Most lots are substandard or under-improved, poorly maintained and do not have any kind of landscaping or screening. Many lots are aesthetically unpleasant and are in extremely poor physical condition. This situation detracts from the overall downtown experience; it results in an inefficient use of prime urban land; and it creates potentially hazardous pedestrian conditions.



Poor Surface Conditions / Potential Trip Hazards

Condition of Existing Surface Lots (Cont.)



Vehicles Encroaching On Sidewalk / Pedestrian Space



**Suspended Chains /
Potential Pedestrian Hazard**



**Poor Signage
Lack of Proper Screening**

Condition of On Street Parking

Another issue / constraint we observed concerned the physical condition of on street parking spaces and on street regulatory signage. Throughout the downtown area, we noticed a fairly significant amount of old loading zones and no parking areas that do not appear to make sense based upon current conditions. It appears that it has been a number of years since any kind of line striping or curb painting has been performed. The overall on street program lacks consistency in terms of posted time limits and parking regulations. These conditions can lead to frustration by shoppers and visitors to downtown, who may inadvertently get expensive parking tickets due to poor signage, faded line striping or improper/out of date curb markings. Additionally there appear to be several street segments that would accommodate the addition of diagonal parking to increase the number of parking spaces.

Parking Supply and Public Transit

It would be tremendously costly and inefficient to attempt to build all the parking needed to support downtown in the immediate downtown area. Over the long term, public transit must be an integral component of any comprehensive parking and transit system. The best municipal parking systems in the country offer a mix of high cost convenient parking; combined with opportunities for inexpensive or even free park and ride facilities for economy minded parkers. The WAVE system in Mobile is eager to assist with possible use of the MODA shuttle as part of a park and ride system. In the short term, the MODA could be utilized to provide deep discount park and ride services by utilizing the existing Civic Center parking lots just south of downtown. Over the longer term, the WAVE could be utilized to help finance and build inter-modal facilities along the perimeter of downtown that could potentially qualify for significant federal funding assistance.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our primary recommendations fall into five general categories: 1) Leadership / Management; 2) Budget / Revenue Reporting; 3) On Street Contract / Enforcement; 4) Parking Supply and Demand; 5) Branding / Marketing / Public Relations / Communication

Leadership / Management / Operations

We believe this report demonstrates a real need for, and a historic lack of, parking leadership in downtown Mobile. By investing time and money in the creation of this report the Downtown Mobile Alliance has demonstrated that the private sector downtown stakeholders are committed to creating a partnership with the public sector to provide leadership and management to parking. The Alliance created the following mission statement to guide their approach to downtown parking:

Downtown Parking exists to support economic development and a high quality of life for our residents by providing a downtown parking system that values each customer and provides a positive parking experience for all who visit the area.

The most successful municipal parking operations are those that have found a way to involve the downtown stakeholders in a meaningful way in parking decision making and operations.

In addressing this issue, the City must decide which of two approaches it will take to downtown parking: 1) it can do nothing and accept the status quo of parking as a barrier to downtown use and investment; or 2) it can become proactive in parking planning and management by investing an appropriate level of resources to transform parking into a professionally managed downtown asset.

If the decision is made to become more proactive in providing parking leadership, planning and management, we believe the City has three basic options to consider: 1) it can develop the staff resources internally and re-align parking responsibilities within the traffic engineering department under public services; 2) it can create a semi autonomous public Parking Authority; or, 3) it can partner with the Downtown Mobile Alliance to develop a “Downtown Managed” parking system. We have developed possible organizational models for each of these options and included them in **Exhibit ‘A’** attached.

The option of a “Downtown Managed” parking system is something that we believe should be considered. This type of parking management model is gaining popularity throughout the country. The City of Pensacola Florida is a good local example of this newer type of parking organizational and management system. In fact, the city is currently in the process of transferring parking management responsibility to the Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board (DIB) through an Inter-local Agreement to become effective October, 2007. If Mobile is interested in exploring this option, the new Pensacola parking system could serve as a possible model to consider for further study and consideration.

Advantages of a downtown managed parking system Include:

- They tend to be more efficient, entrepreneurial and customer focused
- They have greater ability to pull in privately owned facilities under unified management
- They have a vested interest in the success of downtown and a greater stake in positive outcomes
- They represent the current best practices in municipal parking management
- They tend to be more successful in branding/marketing/communications
- They result in greater buy-in and ownership by downtown stakeholders who are directly affected by parking

While we would strongly encourage the City of Mobile to consider the downtown managed option, we understand the creation of a public Parking Authority may be the most realistic long term option on the table. A Parking Authority could be utilized to finance and build needed parking facilities that the private sector is not willing or able to construct. A Parking Authority could build, finance and operate public parking facilities on its own, or it could form public/private partnerships and provide low cost financing to encourage private developers to build additional public parking capacity. Through appointments to the Parking Authority Board of Directors, the City could ensure that affected downtown business owners and stakeholders will be able to participate in the planning and policy making process.

Whatever model is developed, it is important that both on street and off street parking be combined under one planning, management and operational umbrella. It is also important that

the downtown stakeholders play a role in parking planning and management decisions. The attached “Comparable Cities Analysis” provides examples of two different municipal organizational models that could be considered. The report also helps to illustrate how weak Mobile’s parking system is compared to the two other cities included in our analysis.

Budget / Revenue Reporting

The City needs to clarify and resolve the discrepancies between their revenue reports and the reports generated by Central Parking for both fines and meter income. Standardized, easy to understand and use templates and spreadsheets should be developed for future financial reporting and benchmarking. Once developed, these formats should remain consistent from year to year. Perhaps most importantly, there should be someone within the City who will actively monitor parking financials to ensure compliance with contract requirements.

On Street Contract / Enforcement

We believe the on street contract as structured is not in the best interests of the City or Downtown for the reasons described in this report. When asked about parking enforcement 45% of the parking survey respondents thought it was less than acceptable and 51% thought the attitude of the enforcement officers was less than acceptable. It is obvious that the current situation is a major reason for the negative perception of downtown parking.

The current contract is set to expire in September, 2007. **We would strongly encourage the City not to renew this contract as it is currently written.** As stated in this report the current management structure for on street enforcement is dysfunctional. The City must decide if the enforcement personnel are City employees or are to be employees of a private company. There are good examples of effective enforcement provided by both models as long as the management structure is clear and the goal of enforcement well defined. If the City agrees with this recommendation and decides not to renew the existing contract, it should begin the process immediately of re-writing, and possibly restructuring, a new contract under a competitive RFP process. The new contract should be fee based and not revenue based. It should stress performance to established policies and a high level of customer service. Finally and most

importantly, the City will need to assign a person of responsibility who will actively manage the new contract and who will serve as a contact person for the public and downtown community.

Parking Supply and Demand

Understand the Need. Our short term recommendation regarding parking supply and demand is to complete a more up-to-date parking impact analysis for the area surrounding the new RSA Tower. All major parking generators should be included in the study, as well as demand modeling for the impact of new developments such as the proposed Hampton Inn. Given the timing of this new hotel project, efforts should be made to work with this developer under a possible public/private partnership to create additional public parking opportunities as part of an overall development plan.

A more long term approach to address the supply of parking should include long term planning for the creation of additional parking capacity. A more active approach should be undertaken to identify private land and lots that could be assembled and developed into future parking facilities.

Improve What You Have. The City should actively enforce existing planning and zoning codes to ensure that existing surface lots are brought up to code. Consideration should be given to the establishment of “Amortized Zoning” requirements that will force grandfathered non-conforming lots to be improved over time with proper paving, screening and landscaping.

A second recommendation to improve what you have is to perform an on-street parking inventory and analysis. The goal of this study would be to create additional parking spaces by recapturing for general use, loading zones, red zones and other restricted parking zones that are no longer serve the purpose for which they were originally created. The study would also look for opportunities to increase parking by replacing parallel parking with diagonal parking. Our experience in other downtowns is that many new spaces can be created through this process.

Plan For The Future. It is important to understand that, based upon our preliminary observations, we believe existing parking supply may soon be inadequate to support current and pipeline development projects. It is imperative that action be taken now to more accurately determine true parking need and to begin the planning process to develop additional parking capacity.

Branding / Marketing / Public Relations / Communication

We mentioned early in this report that one of the eleven key attributes of a successful parking operation is the effort to brand and market their parking facilities and services. Branding helps to create a more positive image of downtown parking and it is useful for incorporation into consistent signage and promotional materials. A growing number of municipal parking operations of various organizational structures understand the benefits of branding and marketing and are dedicating financial resources to support these types programs. We have included examples of other downtown parking logos in **Figure 12** on the following page.

Parking signage and wayfinding is a very important part of marketing the parking system. The existing signage/wayfinding system should be enhanced to increase the visibility of available parking. Other cities have been successful at including the private sector parking facilities into the marketing and wayfinding program. Nashville is a good example of a system that combines not only the city owned facilities, but also those of three different private sector operators. Nashville has also been successful at negotiating agreements with private operators to have pricing and hours consistent with the public facilities in exchange for a combined marketing effort of both publicly and privately own parking facilities.

Figure 12

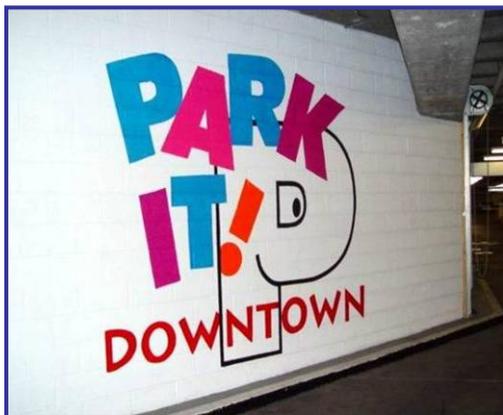


Figure 13

Downtown Nashville Partnership Parking Logo



Multi – Level Branding Opportunities



VIII. PARKING METER REMOVAL ISSUES

We have been asked to provide discussion on the concept of removing meters from downtown in an effort to attract greater retail and business activity. Our experience has shown that parking meters themselves are not as much of a determining factor for the success of a downtown as is the overall offering of shops, services and dining/entertainment venues. With the current weak retail offering in downtown the meters do put the downtown in a competitive disadvantage when compared with other retail areas in Mobile and Baldwin County. In other words, do not believe that removing parking meters will serve as a “silver bullet” cure-all for downtown, but could help create a more competitive environment in the short term.

Ultimately, we do not have a position on meters or no meters, and feel that it is a local political decision. However, we would be very concerned for downtown Mobile if meters are removed without significant changes made to the enforcement program. This report has documented that the existing enforcement program is not working on the Dauphin Street free zone. Parking meters have a natural tendency to encourage greater turnover and they are much easier and more efficient to enforce. If meters are to be removed from downtown, the City must be prepared to redouble its efforts at parking enforcement. If dedicated and sustained enforcement of free parking areas is not maintained, then the removal of parking meters could backfire and have a detrimental effect on downtown.