20 Characteristics of Effective Parking Management

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COMPREHENSIVE PARKING PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Parking, in our view, is an essential element of an institution's infrastructure and, when well-managed, it can contribute greatly to efforts to develop and sustain healthy and vibrant downtowns, universities and medical centers. Convenient, safe, clean and affordable parking is critical to attracting and retaining patients, staff, retailers, restaurants, office buildings/tenants and all other types of customers and developments.

Characteristics of Effective Parking Programs

Based on evaluating numerous parking systems in a variety of environments and of various sizes and complexity, we have identified a set of twenty characteristics, that when combined into an integrated, programmatic approach provides the foundation for a sound and well managed parking system.

These twenty characteristics include:

1. Clear Vision and Mission
2. Parking Philosophy
3. Strong Planning
4. Community Involvement
5. Organization
6. Staff Development
7. Safety, Security and Risk Management
8. Effective Communications
9. Consolidated Parking Programs
10. Strong Financial Planning
11. Creative, Flexible and Accountable Parking Management
12. Operational Efficiency
13. Comprehensive Facilities Maintenance Programs
14. Effective Use of Technology
15. Parking System Marketing and Promotion
16. Positive Customer Service Programs
17. Special Events Parking Programs
18. Effective Enforcement
19. Parking and Transportation Demand Management
20. Awareness of Competitive Environment

A parking system that has addressed all twenty of these characteristics is well on its way to being in a class apart from the majority of parking systems. The ultimate goals are a parking system that provides professional management, understands the role it plays in contributing to the larger objectives of its environment and is responsive to the community that it serves.

The importance of Parking as one of the most visible and often controversial elements of an environment's infrastructure is often underestimated. A well-managed parking system can be a key component in attracting and retaining customers, supporting new programs and developments and is essential to sustaining healthy and vibrant communities of all types.

Characteristic # 1: Clear Vision and Mission

Truly effective parking systems have a clear vision and well-defined mission. The development or periodic reassessment of the parking system vision/mission statements should be undertaken as an open and inclusive process involving a wide range of community stakeholders. In a medical center setting, it is recommended that the following groups be included in the public input process:

- Patients and Visitors
- Administration
- Department Heads
- Medical Office Building Tenants
- Surrounding Property Owners and Residents
- Staff
- City and Planning Officials
- Transit System Representatives

The development of a parking system's vision and mission statements should have one overriding goal; to see that the parking system's purpose and direction are tied to and supportive of the larger community's (or institution's) strategic development plan. There are a variety of ways that parking can support the health, vitality and development of environment it serves. Having a professionally managed parking program that presents clean, safe, attractive and well-maintained facilities is perhaps the most visible dimension. Other attributes include providing an adequate supply of parking overall and ensuring appropriate allocation and management of those resources. The parking system exists to support the businesses that depend on convenient, well-managed parking for their success. Successfully meeting these goals promotes business success, retention and attraction.

The parking system administrator should play a key role in providing educational support to community and institutional leaders about the importance of parking and the role(s) parking can play (and cannot play) in meeting community and institutional objectives. Staying abreast of the latest developments related to parking system technologies can broaden the options available to improve parking system management effectiveness and efficiency. Common problems for parking systems, such as reserving the most convenient spaces for patients and visitors, promoting turnover of short-term spaces without being perceived as "unfriendly or heavy-handed", or providing more convenient customer payment options are good examples. The use of new technologies to support the mission and vision can have a profound impact on the perception of the parking system and how it contributes to achieving the goals of the community it serves.

In successful parking systems, financial responsibilities are well defined and understood. This is a critical component of the vision/mission, as it directly impacts the perception of whether the parking system is meeting its obligations and expectations. Part of this important discussion relates to whether the parking system is expected to be subsidized by other revenue sources or cover all operating, maintenance and debt costs with direct parking revenues. Is parking expected to generate surplus revenue? Is it expected to fund other programs? Which of these options is feasible for your institution depends on a number of variables.

A best practice related to having a clearly defined Vision/Mission for your program is the development of a set of parking system "Guiding Principles". In general, the Guiding Principles should be short and concise, a maximum of one or two typed pages. Some of the elements typically incorporated in such a document include:

Mission Statement/Statement of Purpose – Describes how the parking operation contributes to the success or mission of the larger organization.

Operations/Funding Strategies – Describes how operations are to be funded and also whether the operation is intended to be a self-supporting entity, a profit / revenue center, or a support service sustained through other primary revenue sources.

Interdepartmental Relationships – Defines relationships between various departments, especially other support departments such as Maintenance, Security, Communications, Facilities Management, etc.

Responsibility for Parking Operations – Is parking to be managed in-house? Will it be outsourced? A combination? Are all parking operations to be managed through a centralized operation or can other departments get involved in limited parking operations?

Rate Setting Guidelines – Defining guidelines for reviewing and setting parking rates can be important because it provides a formalized process for review of parking rates. This is generally done in conjunction with the annual budget planning cycle.

Options for Allocating/Procuring Parking – Defining how parking is allocated goes to the heart of the department's mission because of the prioritization process that is required. How parking is sold and to whom has a direct impact on customer service, operational efficiency, funding, staffing, etc.

Parking Planning – Many parking programs have an active and comprehensive planning function. The parking program should be included in all long-range strategic and transportation planning. Other efforts such as on-going facility utilization review, periodic supply/demand studies, site feasibility studies, the development of parking structure design guidelines, etc. should also be considered.

Procedures for Managing Losses of Parking Supply (both temporary and long-term) – Have procedures/guidelines in place for the coordination and replacement of parking spaces lost due to new development.

Definition and Communication of Parking Rules and Regulations – Having clearly defined parking rules and regulations is essential to any parking operation. How these rules and regulations are communicated can vary widely depending on the customer groups served and the environment. Having an effective communications plan can also keep your customers informed of changes brought on by construction and maintenance projects, implementation of new technologies, rate changes, new policies, etc. Additionally, a good communications plan can act as a marketing and public relations tool for the parking department. Parking departments are often criticized because of misperceptions or a lack of information about the performance and contributions made by the department.

Enforcing and Adjudicating Parking Rules and Regulations – Defining who is responsible for day-to-day parking enforcement and adjudication is an important operational decision. This decision can influence how revenues generated by parking enforcement are used. Other key parking enforcement issues that should be defined include: Who defines parking enforcement policies? Who administers the adjudication process? Who sets the rates for parking fines? Who has authorization for towing, booting or other enforcement practices?

Defining Parking Facility Maintenance Responsibilities – Parking facility maintenance is something that is too often cut from capital budgets. The result is often a larger price tag at a later date and can involve significant operational disruptions. Identification of parking facility maintenance as an important parking management principle should not be overlooked.

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Maintenance reserves should be set aside out of parking revenues and be considered a basic expense along with funding of parking operations and debt service.

Special Event Parking – If any one area requires a cooperative effort from the larger community, it is providing parking for special events. If parking supplies are tight, even small seminars or departmental functions can have a big impact to parking operations. On large campuses, several departments sponsoring several small "events" can cause big problems. Having a well-defined system for coordination of special events parking, which is strongly supported by the administration, can provide improved service for all patrons.

Budgeting and Planning Cycles – Because of the high costs associated with the development of new parking and the lead-time required for design and construction of new facilities, parking budgets can benefit greatly by the development of extended budgeting and planning cycles. Extended budgeting cycles better illustrates the needs for retaining revenues to cover periodic and long term maintenance, debt service, equipment replacement etc.

CHARACTERISTIC # 2: Parking Philosophy

A succinct statement or statements reflecting your philosophical approach to parking can be a valuable tool for communicating to your patrons, stakeholders and staff. The following are examples of some parking philosophies used by other parking programs from around the country along with brief commentaries:

Parking Isn't About Cars . . . It's About People

This statement reflects an understanding that parking is not simply the act of temporarily warehousing cars. It is, in fact, more about addressing people needs at the transition from the vehicular to the pedestrian experience. Under this philosophy, issues such as facility cleanliness, safety, lighting, wayfinding and customer service move to the forefront. Functional design elements that directly impact user comfort such as stall widths, turn radii, walking distances, etc. also take on special importance.

People Don't Come Downtown to Park

This concept reinforces the reality that parking, while an important support function and critical infrastructure element, is not the reason people visit your downtown (or hospital/campus). For the downtown to be successful there must be good restaurants, interesting retail and other special attractions. Even the best-run parking system with state-of-the-art facilities will not "attract" people to come downtown. However, poorly-run operations, lack of convenient parking or dysfunctional facilities can definitely be excuses for people NOT to come downtown. The fundamental principles behind this philosophy are three-fold: (1) The role of parking is to support

other downtown or campus activities; (2) Eliminate parking as a "reason not to come downtown;" (3) Recognize what parking is not, i.e., an attraction.

Parking Should Be a Positive Experience

For years Carl Walker had a slogan: "Parking should be a non-event". This notion has undergone a qualitative evolution to make parking not just a "non-event", but actually a "positive experience". In their book "The Experience Economy," Joseph Pine and James Gilmore address the concepts that, especially in America, what customers are actually purchasing are "positive experiences". One expression of this transition can be seen in the healthcare arena. Have you noticed that the lobbies of newer health care facilities have taken on the feel of grand hotel lobbies? At the hospital where I used to work, we extended the look and feel of the new bed tower lobby (marble, glass, air conditioning, etc.) into the parking structure elevator lobbies to extend that welcoming experience out into the parking environment. Similarly, the extensive customer service training we provided for hospital Guest Services staff was also required for parking attendant and valet parking staff. When Downtown Kalamazoo, Inc. took over the parking program in the 1980's, they changed the whole program operational philosophy by asking themselves this question: "How would the parking program be different if it were run by Nordstrom?"

Parking Is the First and Last Experience

Building on this concept is an appreciation of the fact that most of the customer's first and last impressions of any venue really begin and end with their parking experience. A customer might enjoy the best meal followed by a fabulous evening of entertainment while downtown, but if they had to circle and circle to find a parking space, or were accosted walking from their car to their destination by a series of pan-handlers, their whole experience would be tainted. Follow this up by an encounter with a surly, gum-chewing parking attendant upon exiting the parking facility and guess what they'll be talking about the next day? (It probably won't be the delicious meal they had at Gino's or the high quality treatment they received at the Rehab Institute).

Parking Should Be Friendly, Not Free

There is no such thing as "free parking". One of the ongoing challenges that downtowns or campuses face when it comes to parking is cost. Because of land values, densities and walking distance issues, parking structures are here to stay in the downtown and campus environments and with them is the need to charge for parking in one form or another. The perception that parking at the mall is "free" doesn't help (even though it is not true). Even if you promote "free parking" as a marketing concept, someone is paying for that parking. Either through increased taxes or an increased cost of goods or services, the cost of providing parking is still there. This

philosophy recognizes this reality and focuses instead on providing a friendly, well-managed parking experience.

Parking Is a Component of the Larger Transportation System

It is surprising how often parking gets divorced in people's minds from being a component of the larger transportation system. Structured parking, because of its cost, is often the reason that development projects "don't pencil," to use developer jargon. By considering parking in the larger context of a broad range of transit and transportation alternatives, demand management and shared parking strategies can be developed that help reduce the amount of parking required. This is especially true in urban areas and on campuses where good bus transit, light-rail, taxi service and increasingly popular urban residential developments can be found. Developing programs that integrate complementary parking and transportation strategies is a hallmark of this philosophy.

By adopting one or more of these (or other) overall parking philosophies, parking administrators can be more effective in addressing one of their key roles: community education. This educational process begins with your staff and extends out into the community in one-on-one meetings with customers and stakeholders. Using the building blocks of your parking philosophy and parking system guiding principles, the community education process can also take the form of public presentations, parking branding & marketing campaigns and community or institutional outreach programs. The goal of this educational outreach is to help the community better understand the role and contributions that the parking program is playing in support of larger community goals and objectives.

CHARACTERISTIC # 3: Strong Planning

One of the most important characteristics of well-managed and forward thinking parking programs is strong planning. The first step in developing a well-managed parking planning function is to have a solid understanding of, and excellent documentation for, existing parking resources. Documenting the basics is fundamental. Some basic planning elements that should be in place are:

- Parking inventory is complete and up-to-date (including both public and private parking).
- Parking inventories are sub-divided by type and use of space.
- Parking utilization by type of spaces is known and trends tracked.
- Changes in supply are documented.
- Changes in utilization are tracked and understood.

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- ◢ Periodic Parking Supply-Demand Studies are completed.

- ◢ Quality parking maps are available and up-to-date.

One of the key planning tools that parking departments often overlook or don't understand is land-use data. Successful parking systems develop relationships with city or regional planning agencies so that valuable land-use data, information on proposed developments, downtown planning maps, etc., can be obtained and used in crafting parking planning strategies. When reviewing a strategic parking plan, I look for the following items:

- ◢ Is land-use data readily available and up-to-date?

- ◢ Are the work locations of monthly parkers known?

- ◢ Is historical parking development well documented?

- ◢ Are vacancy rates for key properties in the market area known?

- ◢ Is planning for the next parking development "on the drawing board"?

- ◢ Is parking represented and participating in other types of community studies e.g., downtown strategic plans, marketing studies, retail studies, economic development studies, transportation studies, traffic studies, etc.?

- ◢ Have strategically-located potential parking development sites been identified?

- ◢ Are future parking development sites being "land banked"?

- ◢ Are potential sites assembled to achieve an adequate footprint size to develop efficient parking structures (300-325 sq. ft. per stall)?

- ◢ Have parking lot and structure design guidelines been developed?

Parking system planning can also take less traditional paths. For example, identifying creative opportunities for public-private partnerships or joint development projects as a means to solve complex parking problems that affect multiple entities is hallmark of a "best in class" program. Identifying potential shared parking benefits between multiple user groups is often a key to the success of these potential partnerships.

Another important component to the parking planning puzzle is the financial dimension. This is discussed in more detail shortly, but having a defined source of revenues for planned future developments is critical. Stand-alone parking facilities are seldom able to pay their own way. There are, however, many examples of well-structured parking systems that can become not only self-funding, but can also fund future capital maintenance and development projects and, in some cases, even return monies to the general fund. In these examples of financially successful systems it is a common characteristic that revenues from on-street, off-street and

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parking enforcement programs are first used to fund parking programs, including operations, planning, debt service, future development projects and facilities maintenance/restoration. This scenario is more often seen in municipalities and universities and less often in medical center environments.

Having a strong planning function is a key to developing a superior parking program. The degree to which parking is involved in larger community or institutional strategic and master planning processes is a good indication of the strength of the parking planning function. By assembling and sharing accurate and reliable parking information and understanding basic parking planning concepts, parking administrators can enhance their likelihood of being invited to participate in other planning arenas. Having this data available and up-to-date also allows you to be more effective in the role of the "resident parking expert."
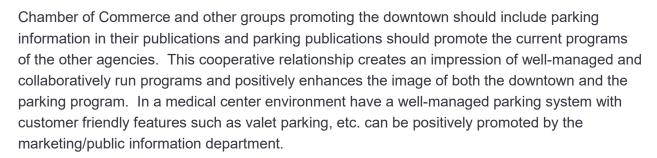
CHARACTERISTIC # 4: Community Involvement

One common problem that is often found with struggling parking programs is that they are operated only to satisfy a narrowly defined set of internal objectives (typically focused on revenue generation). Successful parking programs understand that their larger purpose is to support the larger environment they serve. In a municipal environment, this means the businesses that create and sustain downtown vitality. In a medical center it might mean a keen understanding of patient issues as they relate to parking. For example: knowing that Radiation Oncology patient's treatments generally only last 15 – 20 minutes and that they are sicker when they leave than when they arrive, might lead to the creation of a limited number of high-turn-over, specially permitted spaces to address the needs of this specific patient group.

Parking systems should develop close and cooperative working relationships with other departments (such as Radiation Oncology in the example above) or community groups such as economic development agencies, downtown business associations, planning and facilities departments, etc. in a downtown environment.

This does not mean that the parking system exists simply as a tool to be manipulated by these departments or organizations. The parking operation has its own goals and objectives. For example, if the parking system is operating under a mandate to be self-supporting, it may not be able to subsidize a downtown validation program, even though the local downtown business associations might desire this. However, acting as partners, mutually beneficial solutions can be devised to meet the overall objectives of both organizations whereby costs are shared or alternative funding sources are obtained.

Another significant area of potential partnership is community and parking system marketing. In the many successful downtown programs, for example, parking co-sponsors or shares in downtown marketing and promotional initiatives. The Downtown Business Association, the

Chamber of Commerce and other groups promoting the downtown should include parking information in their publications and parking publications should promote the current programs of the other agencies. This cooperative relationship creates an impression of well-managed and collaboratively run programs and positively enhances the image of both the downtown and the parking program. In a medical center environment have a well-managed parking system with customer friendly features such as valet parking, etc. can be positively promoted by the marketing/public information department.

Successful parking operations actively solicit public input from a variety of sources including: promotion of public forums, use of parking task force groups, and development of a group of "parking advisors" – people who have demonstrated an interest in parking issues (sometimes characterized as "complainers") who are recruited to provide input on an occasional basis. The key to success is to listen to the concerns of your customers, act promptly to resolve the issues (or engage and educate them on the "real issues") and then follow up to make sure their issues have been satisfactorily resolved. By doing this, you short-circuit the stream of negativity which too often circulates among customer groups, and you can begin to build a network of parking system supporters.

CHARACTERISTIC # 5: Organization

In conducting several recent parking system organizational analyses, an interesting dynamic was uncovered related to the evolution of parking systems. When a parking program is started it is usually a small function and is located within an area of an existing organization that makes sense at the time or where certain expertise or manpower is available. Often times in a municipal environment it is placed under Public Works. In a hospital environment is it often under Security. As the parking program grows and matures and is responsible for a larger number of capital assets and increasing revenue streams, a reassessment of how the program is organized and managed is a logical step in its evolution.

Whether your parking program is one functional element under another department, a quasi-independent parking authority, an arm of an urban renewal agency or the responsibility of a Downtown Business Association, an important question to ask is whether the parking organization is structured and staffed to best achieve its stated goals.

Some basic questions to ask related to the issue of organizational structure include:

- ◢ Are all parking operations to be managed through a centralized operation or can other departments or agencies get involved in limited parking operations?
- ◢ Is parking to be managed in-house?
- ◢ Should certain functions be out-sourced?

- Are there advantages to a hybrid approach?

- Does the current organization / staffing plan provide the right mix of skills, talents and abilities?

- Is staffing as efficient as possible? Are there tools in place to evaluate staffing adequacy? Efficiency? Program effectiveness?

When evaluating which organizational option is most appropriate for your particular environment, consider the following criteria to evaluate the relative advantages and disadvantages of each model.

- Provides the best support for economic or institutional development

- Is most efficient

- Is the most customer-friendly

- Is most politically feasible

- Is most focused on the vision

- Is most responsive to business units and stakeholders

- Is most financially viable

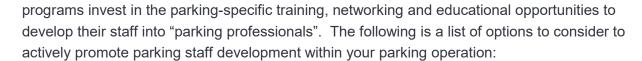- Provides the most effective coordination

Another component of the evaluation process is to identify the program elements for which the parking system will be responsible. The following table provides a list of potential program elements.

CHARACTERISTIC # 6: Staff Development

Another interesting thing about parking is that, unlike property management, public administration, etc., there are no formal educational programs for parking management. You cannot go out and hire someone from the latest crop of college parking graduates. However, this is beginning to change. The International Parking Institute's (IPI) Certified Public Parking Administrator (CAPP) program has been in place for over ten years and is highly regarded. The University of Virginia administers this educational/certification program. The National Parking Association offers the Certified Parking Facility Manager (CPFM) certification program. For the most part, parking professionals still are learning as they go and bringing with them numerous skills and perspectives imported from a variety of previous work environments and experiences.

One characteristic of the most successful parking programs is a recognition of the unique knowledge, complexity and broad skill sets required to be successful in parking. These

programs invest in the parking-specific training, networking and educational opportunities to develop their staff into "parking professionals". The following is a list of options to consider to actively promote parking staff development within your parking operation:

- ▲ Support participation in the International Parking Institute and National Parking Association's certification programs.

- ▲ Support participation in local, state, regional and national parking associations to create networking and peer-to-peer communications. These associations also provide the best access to parking-specific training opportunities for various staff levels from front-line to administrative.

- ▲ A recommended best practice is to have an "Operational Peer Review" performed on your operation. An "Operational Peer Review" involves having representatives from similar programs visit and critique your parking program with a "fresh set of eyes." Typically this service is reciprocated. This is generally a low cost initiative that can be set up directly or through the national, regional or local parking association and is an effective way to gain and share parking knowledge.

- ▲ Build a parking resource library – A basic bibliography of good parking texts that can increase your staff's knowledge of the parking industry is provided in Appendix 9.

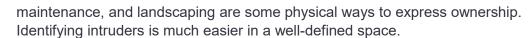## CHARACTERISTIC # 7: Safety, Security and Risk Management

The importance of providing a safe environment in your parking facilities cannot be overestimated. The actual and perceived security within your facilities impacts the success not only of the parking operation, but also the businesses supported by those facilities.

Planning for security in your parking facilities should begin during the design of new facilities. If you are inheriting existing facilities, a security audit of all facilities is highly recommended.

The concept of "Crime Prevention through Environmental Design" (CPTED) provides useful tenets for architects, facility planners, designers, and law enforcement/security and parking professionals. Utilizing CPTED concepts helps create a climate of safety in a parking facility, on a campus or throughout a downtown, by designing a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. These concepts can also be used to retrofit environments to address specific security issues as they develop or to address emerging concerns as conditions change.

CPTED builds on four key strategies: territoriality, natural surveillance, activity support, and access control.

- ▲ Territoriality: People protect territory that they feel is their own and have a certain respect for the territory of others. Fences, pavement treatments, art, signs, good

maintenance, and landscaping are some physical ways to express ownership. Identifying intruders is much easier in a well-defined space.

▲ Natural Surveillance: Criminals don't want to be seen. Placing physical features, activities, and people in ways that maximize the ability to see what's going on discourages crime. Barriers, such as low ceilings, solid walls, or shadows, make it difficult to observe activity. Landscaping and lighting can be planned to promote natural surveillance from inside a building and from the outside by neighbors or people passing by. Maximizing the natural surveillance capability of such "gatekeepers" as parking lot attendants, maintenance personnel, etc. is also important.

▲ Activity support: Encouraging legitimate activity in public spaces helps discourage crime.

▲ Access control: Properly located entrances, exits, fencing, landscaping, and lighting can direct both foot and automobile traffic in ways that discourage crime.

These principles can be blended in the planning or remodeling of parking facilities and other public areas. In parking environments, the following specific strategies are recommended:

Incorporate the following features into the design of new parking facilities:

▲ Higher floor-to-floor heights to improve openness.

▲ Glass backed elevators and glass enclosed or open elevator lobbies.

▲ Glass enclosed stairwells, perhaps open to the interior.

▲ "Blue Light" (or similar) security phones.

▲ Security screening on the ground level.

▲ Limit access at the parking facility perimeter to locations where patrons pass by the office or cashier booths.

▲ Eliminate potential hiding places (for example under stairs, within storage areas, etc.)

▲ Maintain low level landscaping.

▲ Insure that all your facilities are well lighted and meet or exceed the recommended minimums for parking facility lighting as established by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA). Develop facility lighting standards. Provide consistent lighting levels in all facilities.

▲ Integrate security offices, parking offices, retail shops, etc. into parking facilities to provide increased activity levels.

◢ Assess the use of CCTV, alarms, motion detectors and security patrols.

◢ Integrate parking attendants, cleaning and maintenance staff, shuttle drivers, etc. into your parking security program.

◢ Incorporate safety and risk management issues into a weekly facility walk-through checklist.

CHARACTERISTIC # 8: Effective Communications

Best in Class parking operations actively engage other community groups to help define how the parking system can best support the objectives of the businesses and the community at large that depend on a "parking system that works." As an outside consultant coming into a downtown or to a campus environment to evaluate some aspect of a parking program, it is not uncommon to find the parking system at odds with various customer groups. Although there may be as many reasons for this "disconnect" as there are personalities involved, there appear to be at least two primary underlying reasons:

◢ Other groups are focused on their own specific goals such as downtown revitalization, business recruitment or retention, patient care, leasing office or retail space, etc. They see parking costs as one element that places them at a competitive disadvantage with suburban competition or as an negative experience that disrupts patient schedules, etc. At the same time parking system managers are being pushed to increase revenues or decrease operating expenses or operate with a less than adequate supply of parking. The bottom line is they often lack a shared vision and therefore may be are pulling in opposite directions or simply do not understand each other's situation.

◢ The second major issue typically has to do with service level expectations. Downtown associations for example, tend to have higher expectations in the areas of customer service, facility cleanliness, security, etc. It is not that the parking system administrators do not value these same qualities, but there is a cost associated with providing these programs and limited budgets to support them. The irony is that revenues are often reduced by not providing these higher levels of service.

The first step towards resolving this problem is improved communications and the definition of a shared vision/mission. A clear understanding of the issues and potential solutions is the kick-off point for developing the needed mutually beneficial approach. Developing a set of "Guiding Principles" for the parking system (discussed earlier) is a good starting point for crafting a successful collaborative relationship.

Successful programs also have well-defined relationships between various departments, especially other support departments such as: Maintenance, Enforcement, Security/Police, Communications, Facilities Management, Planning, etc.

Finally, successful parking programs are in touch with their customers and actively solicit input through meetings with key stakeholders, customer surveys, websites, parking "hot-lines" and public forums.

CHARACTERISTIC # 9: Consolidated Parking Programs

Taking a systems approach to parking is an important dimension to creating a comprehensive and effective parking program. Having control of all or most aspects of parking can contribute to a more effective operation, because of the interactive nature of parking as a system.

For example – having control of off-street, but not on-street parking can lead to problems if the rates for the various types of parking are not kept in the proper balance or relationship. Another example might be not having control over parking enforcement practices. This can hamper efforts to promote or improve turnover to support downtown retail or support special downtown events.

Ideally, the parking system should control all aspects of a parking system, including off-street, on-street and parking enforcement operations. In many cases parking systems also operate components of a complementary transportation program as well such as the downtown parking shuttle.

All parking related revenues should first go to fund parking programs, including preventative maintenance, maintenance reserves, parking system marketing, planning and new parking resource development. If additional revenues, in excess of operational needs are available, they should be banked as reserve funds for future parking development projects or returned to the general fund for discretionary spending.

CHARACTERISTIC # 10: Strong Financial Planning

The Parking System's financial expectations should be well-defined and clearly understood. For example, is the parking system expected to be a self-supporting entity, a profit/revenue center or a support service sustained by other primary revenue sources?
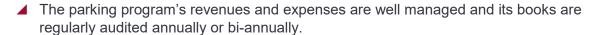
With the exception of airports, some university systems and some very large municipalities, most parking programs are not self-supporting. Many factors, including market rates for parking, parking mix (percentage of transient vs. monthly parkers), availability of on-street parking revenues, availability of parking enforcement revenues, politics, economic development policies, etc. have an impact on whether a parking program can be self-supporting. For systems that cannot achieve true financial self-sufficiency, a common goal is for the parking system to cover all operational costs, excluding debt service costs. Debt service costs are typically subsidized by a general fund, tax increment financing revenues, in-lieu parking fees, or other sources.

An important principal in developing a successful parking program is that parking system revenues should be tied to the larger vision and mission of the downtown or environment it is intended to serve. Development of a strategic plan which incorporates not only market and land-use strategies, but also critical support infrastructure such as parking, transit, pedestrian access, freight mobility, loading and unloading, etc. is an excellent means for defining the relationships of all these components and establishing clear goals and direction. Once the vision and mission have been set, investigation of other possible sources of parking revenues may be desired. Alternative parking revenue sources might include:

- ◢ On-street pay parking (if that does not already exist)
- ◢ Parking Enforcement
- ◢ Tax Increment Financing Districts
- ◢ In-lieu-of Parking fees
- ◢ Special Parking Assessment Districts
- ◢ Etc.

Other important financial planning elements that are recommended for all parking systems include:

- ◢ Having a consolidated parking financial statement that tracks all sources of parking revenues and expenses.

▲ The parking program's revenues and expenses are well managed and its books are regularly audited annually or bi-annually.

▲ Annual operating statements are published in an annual report and available for public review.

▲ If a private parking operator is contracted to manage day-to-day operations, an annual parking operations and financial audit is recommended.

CHARACTERISTIC # 11: Creative, Flexible and Accountable Parking Management

This section encompasses so many potential topics it could easily be a whole book in itself. Therefore, we will only attempt to touch on some key issues and principles.

One key principle is that different land uses, environments and user-groups require different parking management approaches. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. A variety of parking management strategies are required to address different needs, such as:

- ◢ Visitor Parking
- ◢ Employee Parking
- ◢ On-Street Parking
- ◢ Reserved Parking
- ◢ Residential Parking
- ◢ Special Use Permits
- ◢ Event Parking
- ◢ Accessible Parking (ADA)
- ◢ Shared Parking
- ◢ Parking Allocation Plans
- ◢ Loading/Unloading Zone Parking

Another key management principal is the need for strong and accountable parking revenue control systems. This begins with the purchase and installation of a parking access and revenue control system specified to meet your system's needs.

It is important to understand all the components of the parking access and revenue control system and utilize them to their full potential. Many parking systems purchase expensive systems and use less than 10% of the system's capabilities. Using standard parking access and revenue control system reports and creating customized reports can provide enhanced management information, improved understanding of operational dynamics and ultimately increased system utilization and efficiency. An emphasis on training is a key to unlocking the system's capabilities.

Another characteristic of effective parking programs is that they have well-mapped audit trails and developed processes to provide acceptable levels of control and accountability. Because of

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the large revenues generated, revenue control and accountability are key parking management issues.

Developing policies and procedures for anticipating and managing losses of parking supply (both temporary and long term) is another basic parking management responsibility. Some key elements in this area include:

- Planning for and communicating losses of parking supply

- Insuring adequate capacity to handle short-term parking supply losses

- Having effective plans to manage routine maintenance projects, including customer communications and contingency plans

- Having a full understanding of the financial impacts of these projects on revenue streams

- Having defined parking replacement cost policies is another recommended best practice.

Development of an "Annual Parking Report" can have a number of positive impacts for a parking system. It identifies key departmental issues and challenges, promotes departmental achievements, documents the "state of parking" to the stakeholders, creates a record of "system history", and builds credibility and confidence in the department.

Other parking management elements include:

- Well defined parking policies and procedures

- Development and maintenance of parking facility operations manuals

- Well defined and implemented facility maintenance programs

- Parking system marketing/branding programs

- Effective parking and wayfinding and signage programs

CHARACTERISTIC # 12: Operational Efficiency

Another important area to investigate when assessing a parking program is the overall efficiency of the parking operation. Parking system efficiency has several dimensions, depending on how the system is managed. The first area to be scrutinized is the management responsibilities of the system, i.e., what programs is the department or organization responsible for implementing. Once this has been defined, organizational structure and staffing plans are analyzed.

Development of some form of benchmarking or comparative analysis to measure costs and performance to similar operations is highly recommended. Understanding that benchmarking

can be a tricky business – making sure you are comparing apples to apples, there are some basic benchmarks that make sense for a variety of parking operations. For illustrative purposes, a few basic benchmarks include:

- ◢ Parking revenue per space

- ◢ Total operating cost per space

- ◢ Administrative cost per space

- ◢ Maintenance cost per space

- ◢ Citations issued per enforcement staff (FTE)

- ◢ Parking citation collection ratio

Other operational areas can also yield significant savings in terms of reducing costs. Take, for example, facility lighting. Utility costs are integral budget elements in managing a parking structure, but by placing the exterior bay and roof top lights on separate circuits with photo-cells, 25 – 35% of the facility's lights can be turned off during the day, saving significant amounts of electricity on an annual basis.

Another area worthy of investigation is staffing costs in the late evening hours when the income generated is less than the staffing costs incurred. In these situations, the use of Pay-on-Foot applications or "Auto-Cashier Units" can be effective alternatives.

CHARACTERISTIC # 13: Comprehensive Facilities Maintenance Program

Few things make a greater impression on first time visitors than the cleanliness and maintenance of your parking facilities. Beyond first impressions, however, few areas provide a greater potential return on investment than a comprehensive parking system maintenance program.

A few best practices related to parking facility appearance and maintenance are noted below.

- ◢ Paint interior surfaces white to enhance the perception of cleanliness and safety and to improve lighting levels.

- ◢ Develop a comprehensive preventative maintenance program for all essential systems.

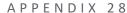- ◢ Parking Access and Revenue Control System

- ◢ Elevators

◢ Lighting and Energy Management Systems

◢ Organize and track parking facility warranties in a binder. Schedule warranty inspections six months prior to warranty expiration. Document inspections with digital photos (ideally with time/date stamps) and written reports.

◢ Regularly schedule facility condition appraisals by an experienced parking consultant and develop a prioritized program of facility maintenance repairs.

◢ Set aside adequate maintenance reserve funds based on a prioritized facility maintenance action plan developed as part of your regular condition appraisal assessment.

There are four general categories of parking facility maintenance:

1.) Housekeeping – This work is typically conducted by in-house staff and consists of basic cleaning, sweeping, slab wash downs, etc. "Housekeeping" includes items such as:

◢ Sweeping of the stairs, elevator lobbies and floors on a regular basis.

◢ Trash collection on a periodic basis.

◢ Slab wash downs on a semi-annual basis.

◢ Floor drain cleanout (including sediment basket cleanout)

◢ Cleaning of stair enclosures (stair, elevator, and storefront glass)

◢ Cleaning of doors, doorframes and glass on a periodic basis.

◢ Cleaning of signage, light fixture lenses, elevator floors, doors, walls, parking equipment, etc. on a periodic basis.

◢ Cleaning of restrooms, cashiers booths, offices, etc on a regular basis.

◢ Daily walkthrough of the facilities by operator to confirm that housekeeping is being performed.

2.) System Maintenance – This includes tasks necessary to ensure proper operations of systems and components. "System Maintenance" includes items such as:

◢ Landscaping

◢ Maintenance – leaves, lawn, trees

◢ Plantings (annual)
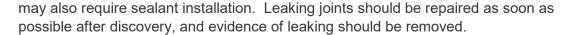
◢ Fencing – posts, chains, etc.

- Planters
- Irrigation Systems
- Painting – spot or seasonal painting
- Parking Equipment Maintenance
  - Ticket spitters, card readers, computers, booths, gates, etc.
- Annual maintenance contract with equipment supplier
  - It is anticipated that parking equipment will be replaced every 7 to 10 years
- Fire Protection
  - A maintenance contract is anticipated
  - Drain the fire stand-pipe system periodically
  - Testing (twice per year)
- Lighting – It is anticipated that the lamps should be replaced every 2 to 3 years
  - Fixture repair and isolated replacement included in operations
  - Fixture replacement every 20 years (included in Capital Expenditures)
  - Lens replacement every 6 years (with lamps, included in operations)
  - Lamp replacement on an as need basis – Operator should schedule lamp replacement by level to maximize light effectiveness, and to maintain economy (Note: Lamp intensity depreciates significantly, well before burnout)
- Elevators - Elevator service contract and maintenance / repairs are generally provided by an outside maintenance firm
  - Periodic cleaning of equipment should be planned
  - Routine maintenance should be scheduled to reduce breakdowns
- Electrical / Mechanical / Plumbing Maintenance
- Offices / Restrooms / Cashiers Booths
- HVAC
  - Exhaust fans
  - Plumbing fixtures
  - Hot water heaters

- Lighting

- Electrical Equipment - General and emergency cleaning / maintenance

- HVAC Equipment – General and emergency cleaning / maintenance

- Mechanical ventilation

- Elevator tower ventilation system

- Emergency power / Lighting testing and maintenance contract.

- Generator: Maintenance contract.

- UPS System: Maintenance contract

- Plumbing - General cleanout

    - Domestic water maintenance

    - Drain wash down lines annually

    - Sump pump inspection

- Doors and hardware – Periodic inspection and lubrication (malfunction, sticking, etc.)

- Signage

- Illuminated Signs – Replace lamps

- Replace damaged signage periodically as required

- Snow removal / deicing

3.)   Annual General Maintenance and Repairs – Annual general maintenance would usually be performed by outside contractors, although in some cases the operator's staff may perform the work. This work is not typically included in a capital cost budget, and may be combined with the System Maintenance category. "General Maintenance" would include items such as:

- Concrete Repairs - Isolated concrete slab, beam, joist, tee, topping, etc. repairs. In some cases, periodic concrete repairs (every 5 years) are included; however, isolated repairs between this interval should be anticipated.

- Masonry Repair – Isolated masonry repair should be anticipated (spot tuck pointing, damaged masonry unit replacement, resetting cap stone, etc.).

- Sealants/Expansion Joint – Repair/replacement of isolated sealant (floor and façade) or expansion joint failure (not included under 5 year warranty). Leaking at slab cracks

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may also require sealant installation. Leaking joints should be repaired as soon as possible after discovery, and evidence of leaking should be removed.

▲ Deck Coating - Isolated deck coating repairs (not included under the 5 year warranty). Wear of the topcoat should be repaired prior to damage to the underlying base membrane.

▲ Painting – Painting touchup (spot / seasonal painting) should generally be performed as damage is observed. It is anticipated that repainting of exposed steel and concrete surfaces would be performed every 10 to 15 years, and parking stripes reapplied every 2 to 3 years.

▲ Graffiti Removal – Graffiti removal should be completed as soon as possible after the application.

▲ General Electrical Repairs & Maintenance - Isolated corrosion damage, switchgear maintenance, panel maintenance.

▲ Light Fixture Repair / Replacement – Individual light fixture repair or replacement will require immediate attention.

▲ HVAC – Office, Restroom & Elevator HVAC repairs.

▲ Plumbing – Isolated replacement of drain lines and floor drain grates; isolated cleanout of drains / lines; Periodic sump pump repairs.

4.) Periodic Repairs, Protection, and Improvements (Capital Expenditures) This work is generally performed by outside contractors under the direction of parking consultants experienced in restoration and will consist of replacing/repairing damage to waterproofing or structural elements.

▲ Annual Maintenance Costs by Category

▲ Housekeeping, Operations & Operator Maintenance, will vary based on specific operations requirements, but will approximate $350 to $450 per space per year.

▲ Annual General Maintenance and Repairs costs will approximate $0.10 to $.15/sf per year ($35 to $50 per space per year), depending on condition and type of structural system.

▲ Periodic Repairs, Protection, and Improvements (Capital Expenditures) - The maintenance reserve fund can likely be lower during the first 10 years of life, and increased to accommodate improvement planning budgets. For a new structure, this item may range from $75 to $100 per space per year for the first 10 years.

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CHARACTERISTIC # 14: Effective Use of Technology

"Best in Class" parking operations almost always have a comprehensive and integrated parking access and revenue control system that offers the following benefits:

- ◢ Consistent operations and features for customers.

- ◢ Simplified/consistent training for staff and auditors.

- ◢ Similar equipment and models that provide for simplified maintenance and less costly parts stocking.

- ◢ Consolidated system-wide reporting and management information.

Staying informed of new technologies can help provide the parking department with the best tools available to achieve its specific goals. New technologies can help you and your staff, "work smarter, not harder," thereby improving your efficiency and effectiveness. Customer service levels can also be enhanced through the use of Automatic Vehicle Identification (AVI) systems, web-based permit renewal programs, pay-on-foot payment stations, etc.

Other benefits of incorporating new technologies are improved overall efficiency and effectiveness, reductions in operating expenses, improved management controls and the ability to implement seamless, customer friendly payment system options such as Internet payment options. These types of system improvements also improve the professional image of, and confidence in, the parking system. This, in turn, enhances the reputation and marketability of the community it serves.

CHARACTERISTIC # 15: Parking System Marketing, Branding and Promotion

In general, this is one of the most neglected and under-valued aspects of parking system management. An effective parking system marketing and branding program is one way to quickly set your parking operation apart from the typical. While this area is not usually a major focus area for hospitals and medical centers, there are several elements listed below that can be successfully applied. The following is a list of potential action items that can help launch a new, or enhance an existing, parking program:

- ◢ Develop a consistent Parking System Brand

    - ◢ The brand should promote the image you want people to have of the system.

    - ◢ A "brand" is more than a logo or tag-line.

    - ◢ The brand should reinforce the positive aspects of the system – "Free and Easy Parking," "Visit Downtown and Parking Is On Us" Downtown San Antonio...We've got a space for you," etc.

- ◢ Use consistent external signage to "tie the system together".

- ◢ Have a parking tie-in to most promotional materials.

- ◢ Expand and improve the parking system website. Provide useful links to related activities/supported areas or businesses served.

- ◢ Develop new employee/tenant parking brochures or info packets.

- ◢ Develop parking "E-Bulletins" to be distributed to monthly/contract parkers.

- ◢ Designate a parking spokesperson.

- ◢ Develop strategies for regular contact with customers, especially personal contact, between the parking manager and key stakeholders.

- ◢ Look for practical opportunities to connect the parking program to community initiatives, for example: develop parking deck floor identification (themed graphics, music, etc.) as an extension of a local public arts program.

- ◢ Develop cooperative relationships between public and private parking operations to effectively enhance parking supply in support of large public events.

- ◢ Develop a parking information database (including both public and private resources).

- ◢ Use your monthly parking billing system to distribute system info and promotional materials.

▲ Utilize "Guerrilla Marketing" (creative/low cost concepts) techniques.

CHARACTERISTIC # 16: Positive Customer Service Programs

All communities and organizations benefit when the parking system functions at a high level and contributes to positive customer experiences. Because parking is often the first and last impression customers have of a community/area, providing a high level of customer service is important not only to the parking program, but to the business interests it serves. When weighing the importance of customer service, consider these statistics:

▲ An average business never hears from 96% of its unsatisfied customers.

▲ On average, for every complaint received there are 26 customers with problems.

▲ The average unsatisfied customer tells 9-10 people about his or her problem.

▲ Customers who have had the problems solved tell, on average, 5 people.

A strong customer service program can provide the following benefits:

▲ Helps create a more "friendly" atmosphere.

▲ Improves the image of the Parking Department and the Community.

▲ Contributes to increased facility utilization (and therefore parking revenue, sales tax revenues, etc.)

▲ Contributes to increased acceptance of, and adherence to, parking regulations.

What are some characteristics of bad customer service?

▲ Indifference

▲ Unfriendliness

▲ Runaround

▲ "Joe Rule-Book"

▲ Not listening

▲ Getting the brush-off

▲ Just going through the motions

▲ No follow-up

What are characteristics of good customer service?

▲ Always be friendly and respectful.

- Allow customers to fully explain their situation, without interruption (let them vent).

- "Actively listen" to what your customers say.

- Ask questions seeking clarification.

- Maintain eye contact.

- If the customer is making a complaint, always apologize for the situation (and mean it!)

- Explain what you can do for the customer, not what you can't do.

- Always remember that tone of voice and physical movements convey meaning.

- Walk through the service process with the customer and explain the options.

- Help the customer understand the options and achieve a level of buy-in.

- Make sure they know you are there to help.

- Always conclude a service opportunity with a thank you.

- If possible, follow up with the customer to see if the solution worked and if they are satisfied.

Other recommended strategies to improve customer service include:

- Focus on employee training and good hiring practices.

- Hire friendly, attentive, outgoing, knowledgeable attendants.

- Increase personal contact between the parking system manager, stake holders and customers.

- Institute performance measurements and utilize the results for company and employee incentives.

- Create and implement a parking services program (battery jumps, lock-outs, flat-tires, escorts, audio book check-out, etc.)

- Implement a "Parking Hot Line" – (immediate response, centralized, easy to remember [555-PARK], and follow up!)

- Improve website and links (use as a customer service tool, i.e., provide opportunities to pay fines, obtain information - such as downloadable maps, rate schedules, special event info - etc.)

- Measure program effectiveness (customer surveys, etc.)

- Implement a secret shopper program to evaluate customer service.

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◤ Implement customer friendly systems such as AVI, Valet Parking, etc.

◤ Develop processes to make it easier for larger organizations to get their employees into the system.

CHARACTERISTIC # 17: Special Events Parking

Coordinating parking for special events, almost more than any other parking management activity, requires a coordinated and cooperative effort with the larger community. Some of the keys to success in this area include the development of a well-defined special events policy and detailed systems for coordination of special events.

Another important dimension is the development of strong relationships with the key stakeholder groups that are active in the downtown. Providing practical incentives for other groups to communicate with and include the Parking Department in their planning processes early-on is critical. Examples of the incentives parking can provide includes special services such as: coordination services, parking validations or discounts, preferred or reserved parking, waiving of parking enforcement, etc. for those who participate in the special event planning process.

Finally, be consistent in providing those that work with the parking system a high level of service. Conversely, provide disincentives for those that ignore the special events parking policy or chose to not include parking in their planning.

CHARACTERISTIC # 18: Effective Enforcement

Having an effective parking management program requires that the rules and regulations be enforced. The key to an effective parking enforcement program is clearly defined and communicated regulations, attitude, consistency and fairness. Best in Class parking operations have adopted the philosophy of being customer focused not revenue or violator focused.

The following are enforcement program elements that help assure that your program avoids some common pitfalls.

▲ Define who sets enforcement policies and have an approved process for occasional review of assessment of enforcement policies.

▲ Make sure your parking enforcement policies are developed to achieve the specific issues that need to be addressed. For example, if promoting turnover of on-street spaces (reducing the frequency of long-term employee parking in on-street spaces) is the primary objective, ask yourself: Is your fine structure weighted specifically to achieve this objective?

▲ Evaluate the legal issues and specific laws or ordinances that support your enforcement policies.

▲ Define who is responsible for day-to-day parking enforcement. Have a central number that all customers and affected parties know to call for info regarding parking enforcement (eliminate the run around).

▲ Assure that parking rules, regulations and consequences are clearly posted.

▲ Assure that staff understand and can articulate the intent behind enforcement policies and regulations.

▲ Assure that if towing or booting is a possibility, the number to call for towed/booted vehicles is clearly posted.

▲ Clearly define and communicate how enforcement revenues are to be collected and used.

▲ Have a clearly stated process for adjudicating parking citations.

▲ Define who has the authority for towing, booting or other enforcement practices. (Generally speaking this should be limited to one or two groups.)

▲ Make paying for parking citations as easy as possible.

▲ Provide incentives for early citation payment and disincentives for late or non-payment.

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CHARACTERISTIC # 19: Parking and Transportation Demand Management

Because the cost of providing parking can be very high, strategies to manage parking demand are an important consideration in parking system planning. Incorporating parking and transportation demand management also ties into environmental goals and objectives such as the desire to reduce pollution, decrease traffic congestion, reduce reliance on single occupant vehicles, etc.

When evaluating options to reduce parking demand, one effective strategy is to integrate transportation demand management strategies into your parking program philosophy. A few best practices in this area include:

- Use parking rates as a tool to promote desired behaviors.
- Take advantage of employer-paid and employee-paid pre-tax benefit options.
- Promote carpool/vanpool programs.
- Provide preferential parking for carpools/vanpools.
- Subsidize transit passes for downtown employees.
- Provide a "Guaranteed Ride Home" program for those who participate in transportation alternative programs.
- Integrate bicycle racks and storage lockers in parking facilities.
- Show transit stops on parking maps.
- Provide remote parking options and promote park and ride options on the parking web site.

CHARACTERISTIC # 20: Awareness of the Competitive Environment

Another characteristic of effective parking programs is that they are keenly aware of their competitive environment. They actively monitor private sector parking operators for changes in rates, new services offered, new technologies being used, etc. One of the most fundamental practices that all parking programs should engage in is a formalized process for evaluating parking market rates. It is recommended that parking market rate surveys be conducted bi-annually to help maintain an awareness of the competitive climate. This information can also be valuable during annual budget planning.

Another dimension to staying competitive is being aware of what parking systems in other municipalities are doing. What has been tried? What has worked? What hasn't? Participating in national, regional and state parking associations, sending key staff to parking conferences

and implementing the peer-review process discussed under the Staff Development section earlier are good ways of developing a network of contacts to help you stay up-to-date on the latest technologies and management practices.

In Summary…

The importance of Parking as one of the most visible and often controversial elements of an institution's infrastructure is often underestimated. Parking, when well-managed, can be a key component in attracting and supporting new business and is essential to sustaining a wide range of healthy and vibrant environments.