



MEMORANDUM

To: City of Santa Rosa
From: Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates
Date: October 24, 2016
Subject: Public Outreach Summary

The Santa Rosa Parking Management team has engaged in public outreach efforts to understand the views and needs of stakeholders and Santa Rosa residents, business owners, and visitors. This memo synthesizes public outreach strategies and information gleaned thus far to incorporate public input into parking management plans. The results will inform the City's parking management policies in Downtown Santa Rosa and Railroad Square. The key lessons learned will also be highlighted in the final report documents. A variety of helpful feedback was received on all aspects of the parking system as well as broader goals for the downtown and Railroad Square – this was a valuable mechanism to help shape parking plans. Perhaps most notably, a strong request for an employee parking program was noted by many participants.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In June 2016, the project team held stakeholder interviews at Santa Rosa City Hall with 30 key stakeholders involved in Santa Rosa's downtown revitalization, including property owners, Chamber of Commerce members, environmental advocates, developers, restaurant owners, neighborhood association representatives, contractors, storeowners, and retailers. The opinions we gathered from them during these stakeholder meetings provided important insights into existing parking conditions and Santa Rosa's unique downtown dynamics and parking issues.

One of the major issues raised during interviews was the absence of downtown employee parking programs. Given that most downtown workers are low-income and work late shifts, many stakeholders expressed the need for designated off-street employee parking facilities that are affordable, convenient, and safe. Some advocates suggested that all cities in Sonoma County should charge for parking – beginning with employees – to increase transit use, walkability and parking availability. Merchants also stressed the importance of providing customers with easy and convenient parking options to minimize the occurrence of and concern for minor parking infractions. There was minor dissention on the role and benefits of paid parking in general – with some participants noting that other cities and towns in the county do not currently charge for parking.

Various participants across all stakeholder groups attributed parking issues to a need for better parking management rather than increased parking supply. They acknowledged that, as a whole, downtown has an adequate supply of parking. Railroad Square's future parking supply needs, however, were a point of concern for many stakeholders. Several retailers noted that underutilized garages could become more attractive with price incentives or advertising, and that real-time parking information could encourage development, foster a positive perception of downtown, and reduce congestion in the area.

Participants also voiced concerns with downtown aesthetics, walkability, and homelessness. Several people commented that addressing homelessness and making improvements to areas in

disrepair could improve the overall appearance of the downtown and encourage businesses to move into empty blocks and storefronts. When asked about the upcoming SMART train service, stakeholders noted the inevitable changes in parking demand and their desire to minimize congestion and parking overflow which could negatively impact downtown activity.

ONLINE AND INTERCEPT SURVEYS

With the support of the City of Santa Rosa's parking management team, the project team created a parking management survey that was distributed to thousands of Santa Rosa residents and visitors in person and online. The surveys included questions on travel modes, choices, and time, as well as downtown parking and expenditures and the future SMART train.

Of all 1,150 respondents, over 1,000 people completed the survey online, and nearly 100 responded in person. In-person surveys were conducted on Thursday afternoon on June 23rd, 2016 and during the Wednesday Night Market on July 13th, 2016. The online survey was open for the entire month of June 2016. The two surveys differed only in that the intercept survey included location- and time-specific questions such as why they came to the area at that time and how much money they spent while there.

The online and in-person platforms allowed for a wide variety of responses from a diverse set of community members with varying priorities. The survey results crafted a community-wide perspective of current parking conditions and perceptions in Downtown Santa Rosa and Railroad Square neighborhoods.

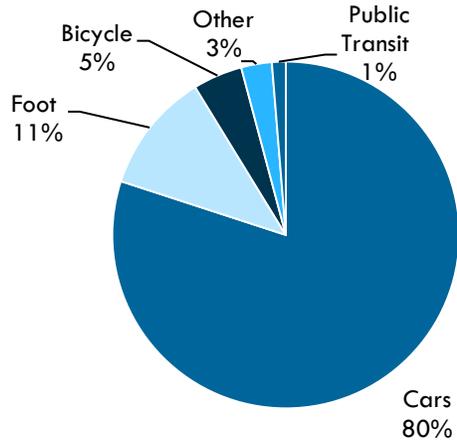
A third survey was conducted by the City of Santa Rosa during the months of August and September 2016. This survey was restricted to Santa Rosa employers who own businesses in the downtown and Railroad Square neighborhoods. A total of 45 employers completed the survey, their responses summarized below. Survey questions varied significantly from the online and intercept surveys.

For simplification, the term "community survey" refers to the combined results of the online and intercept surveys, while the term "employer survey" is used to signify the third survey distributed only to local business employers.

Community Survey Results

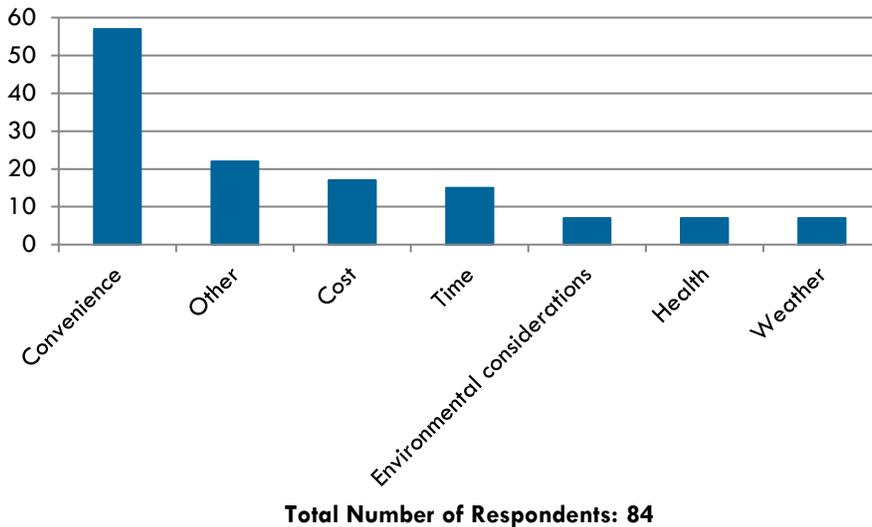
Almost 50% of community survey respondents chose to visit the area due to the quality and uniqueness of shops, and 71% of these respondents came to the area specifically to eat or drink, demonstrating the important role that businesses play in downtown's development. The community survey also revealed that most respondents are auto-dependent, with over 80% driving to Downtown Santa Rosa/Railroad Square (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Respondents' Typical Means of Transportation to Downtown Santa Rosa/Railroad Square



Among all community survey respondents, 68% chose their mode of travel based on convenience (Figure 2). Of those respondents who drove, 80% stated that the proximity to their destination was a factor in deciding where to park. Survey results also revealed a relationship between parking and economic activity – with 50% of respondents claiming that more parking availability would encourage them to visit the area more often. More downtown visitors would lead to increased pedestrian traffic and economic activity, two objectives deemed important in stakeholder interviews.

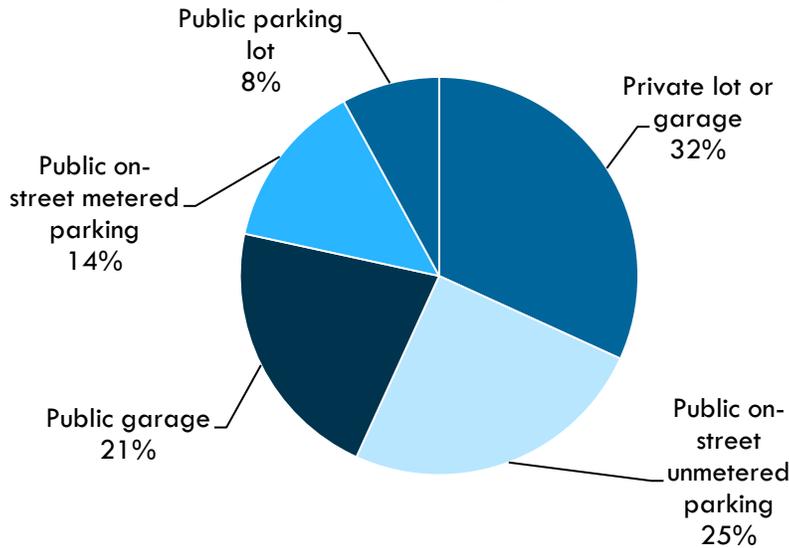
Figure 2: Factors that Influence Participants' Transportation Mode Choice (Intercept Survey Only)



Employer Survey Results

The employer survey was restricted to employers who own businesses in and around Downtown Santa Rosa and Railroad Square. Respondents were primarily asked questions regarding employees' travel and parking habits. According to respondents, approximately 80% of their employees drive to work alone – similar to community survey respondents. Among employees who drive alone to work, employers estimated that 28% park in a private lot or garage, 22% at an unmetered parking space, and 19% in a public garage (see Figure 3). Among all 45 employers who responded to the survey, 51% responded that they neither pay for nor provide parking for their employees, while 37% said that they do. The remaining 12% paid for or provided parking, but only for a limited number of staff.

Figure 3: Employers' Perceptions of Where Employees Park



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PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETINGS

July 28th Meeting

On July 28th, 2016, a public meeting was held at the DeTurk Round Barn in the West End Neighborhood of Santa Rosa. The 26 attendees of this meeting were primarily comprised of nearby residents, from the West End and adjacent neighborhoods. Some of their feedback was reflective of perceptions of neighborhood residential streets, rather than downtown metered areas. Following a presentation with an overview of progressive parking policies, attendees participated in two activities in which they listed the most difficult aspects of parking in Santa Rosa and where these difficulties are observed. A third poster board was left blank for participants to provide additional feedback for the project team to consider. Attendees also received a handout describing the history of progressive parking policy, benefits of such plans, and examples of other policies in North American cities. The next public meeting will provide another opportunity for stakeholders to give their input on potential progressive parking strategies for the city.

Q&A Session

In the question-and-answer session following the parking presentation, several participants expressed the importance of incorporating resident perspectives into downtown parking management. Some participants pointed out that the online survey administered by the city's parking management team did not adequately address their concerns such as a parking spillover into adjacent residential neighborhoods. Some residents expressed concern that the survey focused mostly on experiences from downtown shoppers and visitors rather than residents. Residents placed a variety of comments on the 'Vision for Downtown Santa Rosa's poster board, including suggestions to increase on-street parking prices to make off-street parking more attractive, using the mall as a parking area for downtown employees, monitoring the effects of commercial parking spillover onto residential streets, and improving sidewalk conditions.

Group Activities

After the presentation, participants placed dots on a map of Santa Rosa to mark areas where parking is difficult or easy around Downtown and Railroad Square. Residents noted that parking occupancy is largely dependent on time and location. For instance, special events such as 6th Street Playhouse theatre performances cause severe parking difficulties. In contrast, parking is easy to find outside of normal business hours early in the morning or late at night. Residents expressed differing opinions based on their preferences and experiences. One participant did not go downtown for lunch to avoid the parking issues, while another resident felt that parking in Santa Rosa is easy in comparison to San Francisco.

Fourth and 5th streets in downtown as well as Donahue Street in the West End neighborhood were all unanimously marked as 'difficult to park.' Another area where participants expressed difficulty parking was near the intersection of Jefferson and 7th streets. All parking structures were marked as 'easy to park', with the exception of those along 5th Street, particularly between B Street and Mendocino Avenue, and D and E streets. Several residents noted that some commercial lots are underutilized and remain unused even when all other parking spaces are occupied.

For the second activity, participants marked the top three factors that make their parking experience difficult in Santa Rosa. A plurality of participants placed a sticker in the 'it isn't difficult to park' section, to express their lack of concern with parking in the city. The input on this question may have been reflecting conditions on neighborhood residential streets in the area – many attendees were more interested in discussing residential neighborhood parking rather than downtown retail street conditions. Other common responses included 'disabled placard abuse' (9 residents), 'can't find a space' (6 residents), and 'worried about getting a ticket' (4 residents). Several residents remarked that they faced other issues not featured in the activity, including downtown spillover parking blocking their driveways and inadequate parking regulation signage in residential communities.

August 24th Meeting

On August 24th, 2016, the project team hosted a public meeting at the Santa Rosa City Hall with 35 attendees. The meeting was predominantly attended by members of the business community and Santa Rosa small business owners. Following a presentation similar to the first meeting, attendees engaged in an extended question-and-answer session, followed by three group activities. The activities gathered input on the easiest and most difficult places to park in Santa

Rosa, reasons parking in Santa Rosa can be difficult, and potential solutions to the City's parking problems. Attendees received similar handouts to the first meeting, including a handout describing the history, benefits, and examples of progressive parking policies in North American cities. This was the second of two outreach meetings organized by the project team.

Q&A Session

The majority of participants expressed general support for the project. The two attendees who expressed concern supported free parking as a means to improve business. Those in support of progressive parking supported it on account of the policy's track record of improving business in other communities. Most input acknowledged that it was sensible to raise parking rates on the busiest retail streets, such as 4th Street, and high demand lots and garages. One participant commented that parking reform could not improve corridor access or the economic vitality without having complementary bicycle, pedestrian, and transit infrastructure improvements.

Several participants also expressed concerns about safety. Two restaurant employees who attended the meeting noted that while the cost of parking was an issue, so was leaving the restaurant mid-shift to pay the meter, and walking to their vehicle at the end of their 2:00am shift. Participants suggested changing paid parking hours to start later in the day and creating a designated parking area for downtown employees.

Group Activities

After the question-and-answer session, meeting attendees participated in a group activity that asked them to provide feedback on parking challenges and solutions throughout the city, as well as where parking challenges exist. Each prompt was presented in the form of a poster board, and participants provided feedback with dot-shaped stickers. Each participant received 12 stickers – three to answer what makes parking in Santa Rosa difficult for them, three to suggest strategies to improve parking, and six to indicate where parking is the most and least difficult throughout the Downtown and Railroad Square areas (three for the most difficult and three for the easiest). While participants were told not to use more than the allotted number of stickers on each board, they were permitted to place multiple stickers next to each option on the boards.

On each poster board, several patterns emerged. When asked about parking difficulty, the majority of respondents reported safety and fear of ticketing as the biggest challenges. Notably, only one participant believed that parking costs too much (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – What Makes Parking in Santa Rosa Difficult for You?

Parking Challenge	# of Votes
Parking is located in areas that don't feel safe	16
Worried about getting a ticket	12
Parking too far from destination	6
Unsure where garages are located	6
Confusing / lack of information	5
Disabled placard abuse	5
Can't find a space	3
Other challenges	3
Parking isn't difficult	2
Parking costs too much	1
Parking in areas that leave car susceptible to theft	1
Spaces are too small / difficult to park in	1

When asked about parking solutions, many respondents indicated their preference for cheap remote parking options for employees. The second most common preferred solutions were better parking signage at public lots and garages and more competitive garage pricing. Notably, no participants desired to increase parking supply in downtown (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – What Strategies do you Think Would Make Parking in Downtown Santa Rosa Easier or More Convenient?

Parking Solution	# of Votes
Identify cheap remote parking options for employees	18
Better mark and advertise public parking lots and garages	8
Price garages more competitively to free up on-street parking spaces	8
Eliminate time limits so you don't have to move your car or risk a ticket	7
Incentivize transportation modes other than driving (i.e. transit, walking, biking)	7
Invest in improving a sense of public safety so you can park and walk further distances	5
Encourage businesses to share parking supply with other businesses so there are more places to park	3
Change paid parking hours to start and end later in the day	2
Make the area more walkable so you only have to park one time for multiple errands	2
Price parking to free up open spaces on key retail corridors where parking is most in demand	2
Use technology to communicate real-time availability of parking supply	1
Create more parking supply (garages/lots)	0

Public Outreach Memo
City of Santa Rosa

Lastly, when asked about parking difficulty at specific locations in Downtown Santa Rosa and Railroad Square, participants responded similarly to attendees of the first meeting. Fourth Street was deemed to be the most difficult place to find parking. Participants also indicated that 3rd and 5th streets in downtown and 3rd and Wilson streets in Railroad Square are nearly as difficult to park in as 4th Street. The easiest locations to find parking are nearby the US-101 freeway and in garages along 2nd Street in downtown.

The feedback received from the public meeting, along with the stakeholder interviews and survey results, will inform the recommendations to the City's parking management policies. Of the many valuable insights gathered during these surveys, meetings, and activities, among the most notable was the strong interest in an employee parking program and improved walking conditions.