



DMMC In Depth

Parking Management Strategies: A review of the state of the practice

A DMMC In Depth is a guide that informs mayors and managers (and likely a broader audience) about a priority issue in a summarized fashion. Like a DMMC White Paper, it is meant to help members better understand an issue, solve a problem or make a decision.

A considerable number of strategies have been introduced in recent years to effectively manage the demand, location, timing, pricing and supply of parking. When properly implemented, these strategies have the potential to enhance quality of life outcomes such as public safety, economic development, environmental health and overall community attractiveness. This brief article conveys lessons, opportunities, resources and case studies that reflect the state of the practice in parking management with special attention paid to addressing parking challenges in DuPage County.

Strategies for parking management

Right-sizing off-street parking

Throughout DuPage County and the country, there exist vast numbers of underutilized off-street residential and commercial parking spaces. Underutilized parking arises, in part, from planning policies that use minimum parking requirements to determine the quantity of parking spaces to provide at a particular location. While convenient to implement, these uniform requirements also have unintended consequences including the creation of an overly generous parking supply and pattern of urban design that reduces travel options, increases development costs and exacerbates stormwater runoff.

A variety of approaches have been implemented to *right-size* off-street parking in order to bring parking quantities closer to actual demand. An alternative to uniform parking requirements is *flexible parking standards*. Flexible standards take into account a mix of community-specific variables like density of land use, demographics, availability of non-auto transit and economic factors that affect parking demand and costs. A few examples of flexible parking standards and associated resources are highlighted below.

The [City of Chicago's transit-oriented development \(TOD\) reform ordinance](#) allows land zoned for business, commercial, downtown or industrial uses within one-half mile of a station to be free from minimum parking requirements. The legislation also increases the density allowance for certain parcels within these new TOD districts if the developer provides on-site affordable housing. These changes are designed to increase housing supply near rapid transit (especially workforce housing) and encourage walkable retail. A number of DuPage municipalities—including Elmhurst, Lombard, Glen Ellyn and Downers Grove—have also modified and, in some cases, eliminated minimum parking requirements in their downtowns.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology's (CNT) [Right Sizing Parking Calculator](#) estimates parking usage based on actual parking behavior data. While limited to Seattle and Washington DC, the empirical-based tool challenges the over-reliance on uniform parking requirements in both suburban and urban neighborhoods and is a valuable resource to explore the factors impacting parking demand.

The Village of Westmont and several neighboring communities—including Darien and LaGrange—have modified their zoning codes to provide relief for existing mixed-use developments that repeatedly require parking variances when accommodating a new business and commercial component, and encourage new development and redevelopment with a lessened parking standard.

Unbundling parking is a way to allow developers to separate the cost of parking from commercial and residential leases allowing for a more equitable and efficient arrangement that allows buyers and lessees to pay for only as much parking as they need. Rather than paying \$1,000 per month for an apartment with two parking spaces, renters pay \$800 per month for the apartment and \$100 per month for each parking space. Unbundling parking can reduce vehicle ownership and parking demand by 10 to 20 percent. Refer to the [FHWA's Contemporary Approaches to Parking Pricing](#) for information about unbundled parking.

The Victoria Transport Policy Institute's [Parking Cost, Pricing and Revenue Calculator](#) helps estimate the costs for providing parking in different real estate contexts. Planners can use the calculator to better understand and balance the concerns of developers who tend to want to minimize off-street parking due to cost concerns and neighbors who want to minimize parking spillovers due to quality of life concerns. Refer to the Institute's [Parking Management report](#) for additional information.

[Curb management and the pricing of on-street parking](#)

Managing on-street parking poses a different challenge for transportation professionals; especially those who are planning in/for denser, urban environments. Conventional strategies for managing on-street parking include time limits, colored curbs, meters, low-cost residential permits and manual enforcement. Most cities set *fixed* parking rates in a rather arbitrary fashion, which can result in some combination of excess demand, lost revenue, increased congestion, decreased access to businesses, environmental harm and inconveniences to travelers. Similar to off-street parking, novel approaches for managing curb parking have only recently been adopted in a handful of cities.

One alternative to fixed-rate pricing is *performance-based* or *demand responsive* pricing, which aims to better allocate scarce parking in a way that mitigates congestion and ensures greater efficiency. Parking experts generally agree that one or two spaces of on-street parking per block should be vacant most of the time as a way to reduce or eliminate cruising for parking. San Francisco, via its [SFPark program](#), aims to achieve occupancy rates between 60 to 80 percent per block and Seattle has a goal of two open spaces per block, for example. Performance-based pricing adjusts meter rates to meet identified goals.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) report, [Parking Strategies to Support Livable Communities](#), argues that both off-street and on-street parking strategies should be aligned with the municipality's vision for the future. The report outlines a five step approach to reforming parking policy for communities: (1) evaluation; (2) education and outreach; (3) strategy development; (4) implementation; and (5) monitoring and improvement. With help from CMAP's [Local Technical Assistance \(LTA\) program](#), the Village of Hinsdale carried out the above approach to develop an innovative parking management plan that addresses on-street, off-street and commuter parking in its community.

Conclusion

Understanding the benefits and drawbacks of parking strategies can help communities make informed decisions that balance parking needs with other goals. If your community has concerns and/or resources to share that may enrich this conversation, please direct them to Scott Smith (ssmith@dmmc-cog.org).

Founded in 1962, the [DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference](#) (DMMC) is a council of municipal governments representing over 1,000,000 people. A coalition of cities and villages, the Conference works to voice municipal concerns on local, regional, state, and national issues. It also serves its members and the region by fostering intergovernmental cooperation. The Conference is a not-for-profit organization supported by membership dues and grants.