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Report Defines Parking Situation Downtown, Suggests Solutions

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

Big surprise! There aren't enough parking spaces, especially at peak times, in downtown Lafayette. City Planning staff took on the formidable task of counting every single parking spot in order to define the problem and suggest ways of providing real solutions. Developing a complete set of parking recommendations is helpful to alleviate parking congestion, but it's also an important component of the Downtown Specific Plan.

Information gleaned from staff efforts was used to prepare the Downtown Core Parking Inventory and Parking Occupancy Survey as well as a Parking Demand Assessment. Key findings and recommendations were scheduled to be presented to the Planning Commission on January 3 (after press time) and are included in a staff report for that meeting.

To many drivers, it may not seem like there are over 5,400 on and off-street spaces in the downtown core. With 81% of those spaces located in scattered off-street parking lots, and only 328 spaces, less than 8% of the total, available "without restriction to the public" according to the report - it's easy to see why drivers are frustrated.

In analyzing parking demand, "The problem is not how much parking the downtown core contains; it's where the parking is located, how accessible it is and how it is regulated or restricted," noted the report.

Results of the Parking Occupancy Survey clarify some of the issues, finding that metered street spaces are largely underutilized. A significant majority, 80%, of the employees that responded to the mailed survey said that they parked in the same lot as their place of business. Ironically, over half of the employers that responded said that parking is an occasional or significant problem for customers.

With parking regulations that were adopted in 1977 and parking standards that define the number of spaces required for different land uses last updated in 1989, staff recognizes these regulations need to be updated and fine-tuned. For example, a bakery has a different parking ratio than a coffee shop.

Recommendations that will be presented to the Planning Commission identify the need for additional parking but suggest solving the old problem in a new way. Currently each property is required to provide all parking on-site. Staff now recommends that the City examine parking challenges on a block-by-block basis rather than parcel-by-parcel. This goal, in theory, will make it easier and more economical for individual property owners and could spur development.

Other concrete recommendations to solve the problem include increasing the supply, accessibility and usage of off-street parking. This goal is broken down into small actions: topping the list - pursue opportunities to acquire land for public parking. Also, work with owners of underutilized parking lots to allow the public and employees to park there; work with owners of adjacent properties to connect parking lots; and work with banks to use lots after hours.

Additional suggestions include considering the creation of a Downtown Core Parking Improvement District to update the City's parking regulations and more. To see the complete report, go to the city website at www.lovelafayette.org, click on Agendas, Staff Reports under the Planning Commission heading, then follow prompts to 2011 Commission Agendas and Staff Reports.

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