



The Research Bureau

# Parking in Worcester

Left by the Curb

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**Research in the Public Interest**

Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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## Summary

Cities across the world struggle to accommodate the demands of the automobile. While a critical element in the modern transportation network, the car takes up a significant amount of land for both movement and storage. It spends most of the work day idle, yet it is an omnipresent consideration for working cities.

Worcester is no exception. With the completion of the Worcester Common Garage at CitySquare later this year, Downtown Worcester will boast over 5,000 public parking spaces. Private parking is equally plentiful. Parking can serve three potential purposes: 1) a service for motorists in a dense urban environment; 2) a tool for advancing economic growth; and 3) a revenue generator for the transportation system and the municipality. Locally, parking is challenged to serve any of these purposes as consumers—the driving public—complain that sufficient, convenient, and affordable parking is difficult to find in Downtown Worcester.

This report reviews the state of parking in Worcester. While (despite the grumbling) public parking does exist, its location, condition, and design limit its ability to support an aggressive economic development agenda. Its position within City government—well down the hierarchical food chain—limits its ability to compete for attention and resources and adapt to new technologies that are improving the relationship between parking and cities globally.

The Research Bureau urges the City to reconsider the role of parking in both the Downtown and the structure of municipal government. Reporting directly to the Commissioner of Public Works & Parks, a professional parking chief should focus on management, maintenance, and new investment—design enhancements, improved technology, public realm integration, transportation connections, and other growth opportunities. Parking—its construction and its operation—must be coordinated with other City initiatives such as economic development, public safety, and public health. A strategic parking master plan would identify necessary short-term and long-term actions, and new resources, to ensure that parking contributes to the renewed growth and vibrancy underway in Worcester and is not simply left by the curb.

*“Parking is a city resource, like water or electricity.”*

*- Gateway City Parking Administrator*

Urban planners have a complicated relationship with the automobile. While accommodating the needs of the car has too often resulted in the destruction of the historic city fabric of walkable blocks and interconnected neighborhoods, it has also furthered the growth of cities as regional hubs of economic, cultural, and social life. In the current era, the automobile is a critical element in a successful transportation network. As a result, a lack of sufficient, convenient, and affordable parking is a barrier to the development of an accessible and vibrant downtown. Even staunch advocates for alternative transportation models recognize that cities need cars and therefore cities need parking—for residents, workers, customers, and visitors. Publicly managed parking, consisting of garages, surface lots, and on-street meters, can offer three potential benefits: 1) a service for motorists in a dense urban environment; 2) a tool for advancing economic growth; and 3) a revenue generator for the transportation system and municipality. Yet in urban environments, where land and capital costs are substantial, on-street parking is limited, and maintenance costs compete against other municipal priorities, parking is too often left by the curb.

In Worcester, public parking is a municipal operation falling primarily under the Department of Public Works and Parks (DPWP), through its Engineering and Architectural Services Division’s Traffic Engineering Section. The City operates four garages, thirteen surface lots, and numerous on-street parking spaces with an additional garage at CitySquare under construction. The City’s Commissioner of Public Works and Parks recently announced that existing public garages are in need of significant capital investment totaling \$17.7 million over the next ten years. Parking rates are increasing to address some of this cost, however rate increases alone will not raise sufficient revenue to repair and improve existing garages to ensure up-to-date, innovative parking alternatives in the Downtown. As one parking expert offered, parking is a city’s front and back door—the first place visitors engage with the city upon arrival and the last place visitors experience upon departure. For Worcester’s vision of a vibrant downtown to succeed, well-located, designed, maintained, and managed parking must be part of the strategic plan. This report explores the condition of public parking locally, the challenges of public parking management, and offers suggestions for improving parking management, finances, and experience in Worcester.

Garage	Expenditure
Federal Plaza	\$2.4 million
Major Taylor	\$3.67 million
Pearl-Elm	\$10.4 million
Union Station	\$1.2 million

### **Finding a Spot for Parking in Worcester**

The City of Worcester provides approximately 4,685 public parking spaces in the Downtown through garages, surface parking lots, and on-street parking spaces. An additional 550 spaces will come online later this year with the opening of the Worcester Common Garage at CitySquare. While DPWP is the principal public parking provider, the City’s parking system is supported by a number of City departments, public boards, and an independent contractor.

	Year Opened	# of Spaces
Federal Plaza	1970	511
Major Taylor	2001	994
Pearl-Elm	1949	800
Union Station	2008	500
Worcester Common (CitySquare)	2016 (Anticipated)	550
Surface Lots	Varied	980 (Approximate)
On-Street Meters	Varied	900
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,235</b> (Approximate)

DPWP constructs and maintains all public parking facilities. DPWP's Engineering and Architectural Division, through its Parking Services Office, a subset of the Traffic Engineering Section, is responsible for "parking control management" and "parking supply." The Parking Services Office is overseen by a Supervisor of Parking and is staffed by nine parking control officers and two parking-meter maintenance personnel. Parking receipts (i.e., garage revenues) are held in a dedicated parking reserve fund for expenditure on parking-related matters. Staffing and fare collection at parking garages, however, is contracted out to LAZ Parking, a national parking company that manages over 525,000 public and private parking spaces in 23 states. The City's Collector-Treasurer's Office oversees the processing of parking violations through its Parking Administrator. While DPWP's parking control officers distribute tickets, the Parking Administrator is responsible for all hearings and appeals, and parking fines are held in the City's general fund for expenditure on overall municipal operations. The Worcester Police Department also issues parking citations through its Traffic Division. The City's Economic Development and Law Departments play roles as well, providing leasing support for the disposition of retail space within Major Taylor Garage and, in conjunction with the Worcester Redevelopment Authority, Union Station Garage.\* The Off-Street Parking Board (OSPB), a five-member executive board under the City Manager, is charged with the care, custody, and control of all off-street parking facilities, although it has no independent staff or budget and functions primarily as an advisory body to the Parking Services Office. It meets rarely—three times in 2015, not at all in 2014, and once in 2013. Officially, the OSPB approves the fee structure, regulations regarding the use and operation of off-street parking facilities, special lease agreements, and any contractors hired to manage garage operations.

<b>Table 3: Worcester's Public Parking Revenues &amp; Expenses: FY13, FY14, FY15</b>									
<b>Off-Street Parking Garages</b>									
	<b>FY13</b>			<b>FY14</b>			<b>FY15</b>		
	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Pearl-Elm Garage	\$1,330,928	\$508,024	\$822,903	\$1,321,693	\$400,962	\$920,730	\$1,247,847	\$468,476	\$779,370
Federal Plaza Garage	\$505,608	\$653,424	(\$147,816)	\$487,534	\$589,642	(\$102,107)	\$525,820	\$627,006	(\$101,186)
Major Taylor Garage	\$928,339	\$1,078,725	(\$150,386)	\$1,039,526	\$1,476,652	(\$437,125)	\$1,078,800	\$1,117,177	(\$38,377)
Union Station Garage	\$373,456	\$1,014,749	(\$641,293)	\$398,452	\$953,160	(\$554,708)	\$412,872	\$966,771	(\$553,899)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,138,331</b>	<b>\$3,254,924</b>	<b>(\$116,592)</b>	<b>\$3,247,206</b>	<b>\$3,420,417</b>	<b>(\$173,211)</b>	<b>\$3,265,340</b>	<b>\$3,179,432</b>	<b>\$85,907</b>
<b>Off-Street Surface Lots</b>									
	<b>FY13</b>			<b>FY14</b>			<b>FY15</b>		
	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)
Off-Street Lots	\$259,592	\$395,016	(\$135,424)	\$285,731	\$407,197	(\$121,465)	\$310,820	\$448,337	(\$137,517)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$259,592</b>	<b>\$395,016</b>	<b>(\$135,424)</b>	<b>\$285,731</b>	<b>\$407,197</b>	<b>(\$121,465)</b>	<b>\$310,820</b>	<b>\$448,337</b>	<b>(\$137,517)</b>
<b>On-Street Meters</b>									
	<b>FY13</b>			<b>FY14</b>			<b>FY15</b>		
	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)	Income	Expenses	Surplus/ (Deficit)
On-Street Meters	\$330,252	\$263,993	\$66,258	\$308,755	\$291,856	\$16,899	\$390,679	\$322,366	\$68,313
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$330,252</b>	<b>\$263,993</b>	<b>\$66,258</b>	<b>\$308,755</b>	<b>\$291,856</b>	<b>\$16,899</b>	<b>\$390,679</b>	<b>\$322,366</b>	<b>\$68,313</b>
<b>TOTAL—ALL PARKING ASSETS</b>			<b>(\$185,758)</b>			<b>(\$277,776)</b>			<b>\$16,704</b>

\*The City of Worcester, through the Department of Public Works & Parks, and the Worcester Redevelopment Authority executed a lease agreement for the Union Station Garage retail space on March 14, 2014 allowing the WRA to control and market the space for a share in lease revenues. The WRA, through its urban renewal authority, hired NAI Glickman Kovago & Jacobs to directly broker agreements with prospective tenants.

### A Parking System Running on Fumes

While the City’s parking garages currently operate without annual property tax support, it is only due to the fund balance in the City’s reserve parking account created as a result of advanced payments from long-term lease agreements. As a whole, the system (garages, lots, and meters) has run a surplus for only one of the last three years and that one year of surplus—\$16,704.24—was not sufficient to make up for the previous deficits resulting in an overall three-year loss of \$446,830. Of the garages, only the Pearl-Elm Garage operates in the black. Parking garages and off-street lots generally raise enough revenue to cover operating expenses, but are challenged to meet the annual burden of management and debt service. On-street meters, with relatively low overhead, have the potential to run an annual surplus. Deficits are financed out of the reserve parking account, which held \$3,000,803 at the end of FY15.

**Table 4: Worcester Public Parking Garages: FY16 Budget**

	Revenue	Expenditures
Federal Plaza	\$500,000	\$663,357
Major Taylor	\$1,000,000	\$1,189,520
Pearl-Elm	\$1,457,921	\$515,099
Union Station	\$400,000	\$989,945
Surface Lots	\$325,030	\$325,030
On-Street Meters	\$60,415	\$60,415
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,743,366</b>	<b>\$3,743,366</b>

**Table 5: Worcester Public Parking Garages: FY17 Approved Budget**

	Revenue	Expenditures
Federal Plaza	\$500,000	\$643,900
Major Taylor	\$1,000,000	\$1,182,485
Pearl-Elm	\$1,210,262	\$511,780
Union Station	\$400,000	\$772,097
Surface Lots	\$374,792	\$374,792
On-Street Meters	\$50,415	\$50,415
Worcester Common Garage/CitySquare	\$277,835	\$277,835
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,813,304</b>	<b>\$3,813,304</b>

The City’s current FY16 budget and the approved FY17 budget both anticipate operational deficits in three of the City’s four garages. The City is also covering debt service on surface lots and on-street parking initiatives that would otherwise be assessed against these accounts. According to one regionally-based parking expert, it costs approximately 50¢ per square foot to maintain a concrete parking garage in the Northeast. The City’s numbers do not include this level of basic maintenance. Using that figure, the City should budget approximately \$450,000 annually for basic garage maintenance. The projected revenues of all current public parking assets are not enough to cover management, operations, maintenance, debt service, and over \$17 million in repairs and improvements that the system needs over the next 10 years.

Public parking facilities are primarily supported by user fees. Establishing parking rates requires balancing local market conditions, revenue needs, and public purpose goals. Rates are generally set for three timeframes: hourly, daily, and monthly. Special events and attractions, such as DCU Center activities, command unique user fees due to higher demand. Worcester and other Gateway Cities have set standard parking rates somewhat below market conditions to encourage economic development and travel to

**Table 6: Worcester Public Parking Rates, 2016-2017**

	Federal Plaza	Major Taylor	Pearl Elm	Union Station
1/2 Hour	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00
1 Hour	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00
2 Hours	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$3.00	\$3.00
3 Hours	\$4.00	\$4.00	\$4.00	\$4.00
4 Hours	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$5.00	\$5.00
5 Hours	\$8.00 (Maximum Charge)	\$6.00	\$6.00	\$6.00
6 Hours		\$7.00	\$9.00 (Maximum Charge)	\$7.00
7 Hours +		\$9.75 (Maximum Charge)		\$9.75 (Maximum Charge)
Monthly	\$75	\$80.00	\$109	\$100

downtown areas. While below nearby urban centers like Boston, Providence, and Hartford, Worcester’s hourly and daily rates are in the middle of selected other Gateway Cities and its monthly rates are at the higher end. Worcester’s hourly public parking rates are also comparable to privately owned local parking facilities that offer hourly parking. However, the City’s daily rates—a maximum of \$9.75 on normal work days—are up to two-thirds lower than some privately owned parking lots in downtown Worcester that offer flat rate fees. Additionally, Worcester’s parking rates, whether public or private, are significantly lower than rates at Boston’s public garages. As Worcester’s Downtown grows and attracts additional economic investment, expanding its role as a destination for businesses, residents, and visitors, the City Manager and the DPWP Commissioner have proposed a five-year parking plan that includes raising parking rates at the garages. The OSPB recently approved the suggested increase in rates for the first year of the plan.

The OSPB sets rates for public garages and surface parking lots while DPWP officials set rates for on-street meters. City Council also has a voice, however, as the City Administration must request City Council approval of the overall parking budget and any transfers from the parking reserve fund to the relevant operating account in order to expend funds on management, maintenance, and repair.

In addition to keeping parking rates at garages and off-street parking lots artificially low as part of an economic development strategy, the City and the OSPB have also entered into parking arrangements with developers and businesses for a certain number of spaces at even lower rates. Approximately 79% of the City’s public garage spaces are under reduced-rate agreements. While this situation provides financial predictability, it limits potential revenue and the spaces available for the

<b>Table 7: Select Gateway City Parking Rates, 2016*</b>			
<b>Lowell</b>	<b>Lawrence</b>	<b>Fitchburg</b>	<b>Springfield</b>
4 Garages	2 Garages	2 Garages	2 Garages
After 8 hours, \$8.00 Maximum Charge	After 5 hours, \$5 Maximum Charge	\$5 Maximum Charge	After 8 hours, \$17.50 Maximum Charge
Monthly \$48-\$52	No Monthly	Monthly \$15-\$50	Monthly \$85-\$95

*\*Rates differ during special events.*

<b>Table 8: Privately-Owned Parking Rates in Worcester, 2016*</b>	
<b>252 Main Street</b>	\$15 Flat Rate
<b>20 Exchange Street (Bowditch Lot)</b>	\$10 Flat Rate
<b>100 Martin Luther King, Jr Boulevard</b>	\$10 Flat Rate
<b>12 Foster Street</b>	\$15 Flat Rate
<b>Worcester Plaza Garage</b>	
<b>36-40 Pleasant Street</b>	
Up to one hour	\$2
One to three hours	\$3
Three to four hours	\$5
Four to five hours	\$6
Five to twelve hours	\$8
Twelve to twenty-four hours	\$10
<b>Commercial Street Garage</b>	
<b>175 Commercial Street</b>	
Up to 1 hour	\$3
one to two hours	\$4
Two to three hours	\$6
Three to four hours	\$7
Four to five hours	\$9
Five or more hours	\$10

*\*Rates differ during special events.*

<b>Table 9: Public Garage Parking Spaces and Spaces Special Agreements, 2016</b>		
	<b># of Parking Spaces</b>	<b># of Spaces Under Special Agreement</b>
<b>Federal Plaza</b>	511	430
<b>Major Taylor</b>	994	640*
<b>Pearl-Elm</b>	800	524
<b>Union Station</b>	500	216
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,294</b>	<b>1,810</b>

*\*The U.S. Postal Service has a total of 454 monthly passes at Major Taylor Garage covering three shifts of employees. This chart includes the number used for the day shift—245.*

general public and new businesses. As the Downtown becomes a more desirable place to do business, and as parking leases expire, the City may be in a better position to secure higher rates from new agreements or even diminish the practice, freeing up additional spaces for the general public.

### Structuring Parking in the Gateway Cities

The Gateway Cities struggle to promote economic development and provide services and visitor experiences in downtown areas, all while raising the necessary funds to cover operations, repairs, and capital needs. Yet as Table 10 indicates, there is significant variety in how each city has structured the management of its parking systems. Worcester’s approach, divided among different departments, does not fit neatly into any of the listed categories. Among the Gateway Cities, some assign revenues from parking fees to dedicated parking accounts while others assign revenues to the municipality’s general fund. A number of Gateway Cities hire management companies to run all or part of their system.

Parking Authority	2
Department of Public Works	5
Parking or Traffic Department	10
Parking Clerk	5
Police Department	2
Treasurer	1
<i>*Worcester not included.</i>	

There are three governance models that are commonly used to provide services like public parking: a municipal department dedicated to providing the service; an independent public authority with a mission to provide the service; or contracted/privatized management of the service.

#### *Dedicated Municipal Staff*

A parking department or division is a single-purpose municipal operation that reports directly to a municipality’s chief executive or designee. It is staffed by municipal employees and fees and revenues are usually deposited into the general fund. A dedicated operation ensures that staff focus on parking, guaranteeing that parking remains a municipal consideration. Parking assets remain under the control of the city administration and can serve any of the municipality’s purposes: servicing motorists, promoting economic development, or generating revenue. The weakness of a municipal operation is that it competes against other municipal priorities and there is no dedicated revenue stream for repairs or expansion. Any indebtedness falls under a municipality’s debt cap.

*“Our mission at the Parking Department is to provide people with a service and get people where they need to go.”*

*- Gateway City Parking Administrator, 2016*

The City of Lowell established a Parking Department but, to ensure an adequate revenue stream, also set up a dedicated parking enterprise account. An enterprise account, which requires state enabling legislation, is independent of the general fund, has its own financial statements, and can only be used for a specified purpose—in the Lowell Parking Department’s case the operations and maintenance of the parking system. Lowell has had significant success with this model. Since 2011, Lowell’s revenues from on-street parking meters has more than doubled and total parking revenues have increased by 19%. The Parking Department has focused on parking enforcement, garage improvement, and customer experience using technology for multiple payment options. Lowell is currently expanding its parking capacity with the construction of a new garage.

### *Parking Authority*

In Massachusetts, a public authority is a quasi-public agency run by an appointed board that oversees and manages a public function. It has a limited, clearly defined mission. While board members are often appointed by local leadership, an authority is independent of the municipality and derives its budget from user fees and other financial arrangements—not the City’s tax base. Authorities also have the ability to issue bonds to raise capital. Unlike a municipal agency or department, an authority is intended to be insulated from politics. While independence has advantages, it can also be a disadvantage in that the service provided and related assets are removed from the direct control of a municipality’s leadership, making it more challenging for a municipality to undertake and secure a unified plan or vision. A lack of control over the resource could also limit the City’s ability to leverage new growth by providing special agreements to developers and businesses as incentives to investing in the downtown.

There are only two parking authorities in Massachusetts: Brockton and Springfield.

The Springfield Parking Authority (SPA), created in 1981, is responsible for 710 on-street and 4,168 off-street parking spaces “in support of economic development activities in downtown Springfield.” The mayor of Springfield appoints and removes members of the SPA board at his or her discretion. The SPA receives no funding from the city and has an enterprise account to fund the authority’s budget. The SPA can issue bonds, however the issuance is subject to the mayor’s approval. The SPA owns property, enters into contracts in its own name, and, with the approval of the mayor and city council, has the power of eminent domain. It is responsible for all regulations for public parking garages and issues and collects fees for parking violations. The SPA, which is tax exempt, makes a pilot payment to the City to cover police services.

The Brockton Parking Authority (BPA), created in 1982, oversees one 444-space garage, 1,100 spaces in off-street parking lots, and 506 on-street meters. The mayor appoints the five-member board with the city council’s approval, he or she designates the chair, and he or she has the power to remove board members for cause. The BPA has the power of eminent domain but cannot borrow money without the approval of the City Council.

The enabling legislation for both the Brockton and Springfield Parking Authorities allows for significant oversight from the mayor and city council, which makes them less independent and more open to political influence than traditional authorities. Although each authority has control of its revenues, with the power to issue bonds subject to municipal oversight the ability to plan and set an agenda is limited.

### *Long-Term Leasing & Privatization of Parking*

Contracting parking assets to private firms (by long-term lease or sale) has the advantage of an initial infusion of cash into a municipality’s budget and the removal of parking-related responsibilities from the public’s financial and operational ledger. The experience of the City of Chicago, however, provides a cautionary tale. Chicago, in two separate arrangements, leased four key garages for 99 years (including the central Millennium Park and Grant Park garages) for \$563 million and 36,000 meters for 75 years for \$1.2 billion. Yet by leasing its parking facilities, the City gave up control of a significant asset for what



many argue was substantially less than its market value. Ten years into the parking garage agreement, Chicago has battled Chicago Loop Parking, LLP (CLP) over \$57.8 million in reimbursements CLP demanded for loss of parking revenue due to competition from a nearby newly approved private parking garage. The City has also battled Chicago Parking Meters, LLC (CPM) over \$60 million CPM says Chicago owes for temporary parking meter closures due to construction, festivals, and other on-street activities, and for the loss of on-street parking spaces due to street improvements such as new bus stops. Chicago is also required to compensate the company for lost revenue due to handicap placards. Since the City no longer sets parking rates, on-street parking meter rates went up as much as 400% in the first few years of the contract.

### **The View from The Research Bureau**

While parking must not be the focus of a Downtown revitalization plan, it is a critical component. A well-functioning parking system is an integral element of downtown development and a comprehensive transportation system. Despite the efforts of the City of Worcester's Parking Services Office, the control of Worcester's parking system remains fractured

*The City must seek maximum use and benefit from its parking garages, which cover almost four acres of prime land in the Downtown.*

without a clear mission and dedicated financial resources to manage and maintain infrastructure as well as explore improvements in design and technology necessary to provide a first-class experience for customers. To maximize benefits from parking assets and move the system toward financial stability, The Research Bureau recommends that the City create an independent Parking Division, reporting directly to the Commissioner of Public Works and Parks, supported by an enterprise account in which both revenues and fines are deposited. The Parking Services Office's current location within the City structure—as a subset of a section of a division of a department—is too low for parking to receive the focus that is necessary. The Division should have the financial and operational independence to employ a dedicated staff and make improvements in infrastructure, service, and technology. It should oversee the planning, management, maintenance, and enforcement of all parking-related activities. Importantly, it should participate in a City working group of professional staff—such as urban planners, transportation engineers, and economic development experts—in regular conversation about Downtown needs and operations.

Worcester's parking is affordable, but the rates are below market and in many cases represent negotiated reduced-rate agreements depriving the system of needed revenue. Daily parking fees should be increased and, where possible, special parking rate deals should be renegotiated or eliminated. The City should explore moving certain existing parking arrangements—such as that with the U.S. Postal Service at Major Taylor Garage—to alternate locations like Union Station Garage that do not have the same level of demand. An independent Parking Division should explore increasing revenues by adding premium services, such as reserved spaces, for an additional fee. Naming rights and the sale of limited advertising space on garage exteriors should also be considered, with a focus on pedestrian-level signage rather than aerial billboards. The Major Taylor Garage provides a creative example of revenue generation: a restaurant located on the first floor of the garage not only pays rent but integrates the parking garage with surrounding activity at the DCU Center and Hilton Garden Inn. The City should explore opportunities to carve out commercial rental space in other garages that will generate revenue and enhance sidewalk activity in Downtown Worcester.

New technology has the potential to improve service and profitability. In January 2015, the City of Boston introduced the ParkBoston Application and installed meters that give customers the ability to swipe credit cards. Parking revenues have increased by 11%, tickets for expired or unpaid meters have decreased by 10%, and the City of Boston expects that increased revenues will soon make up for the loss of ticket fines. The use of technology has created a better experience for all of the system's users by saving them time, money, and the aggravation of returning to a bright orange ticket on the car window.

The former executive director of a New England parking authority advises: "Treat parking as a service. Train the people who work in garages to treat those who use them as customers." Parking garages should be well-designed, easily navigated with a comprehensive signage program, and contain appropriate lighting and security that makes drivers comfortable using the facilities and visiting the Downtown. Parking should include electric vehicle charging stations, car-sharing opportunities, and be integrated with alternative transportation modes such as bike racks and bus stops. As the City moves forward with maintenance and repairs, it should look to design enhancements that improve the parking experience.

According to every study on the topic, with over 10,000 public and private parking spaces in Downtown Worcester, supply is sufficient to meet current demand. Yet the driving public seems to disagree, and with the expansion of Downtown activity and growing demand, parking may need to expand. New parking technologies

*"Lose parking, lose the downtown."  
—Former New England Parking Authority  
Executive Director, 2016*

would address many of the misconceptions the public currently has about the ease of finding parking in Worcester. On-street parking should be clearly marked, with spaces outlined on the pavement as well as through branded, visible signage. On-street parking meters should provide a range of time limits depending on the needs of the surrounding businesses. Like in Boston, payments should be possible through credit card or online systems. A comprehensive digital signage program, integrated into the City's Wayfinding Initiative, should show not only the direction and location of public garages and lots, but also the real-time availability of parking spaces within each. For example, Union Station Garage is approximately 1/4 mile, or just over a 5-minute walk, from Worcester Common and the DCU Center, yet the lack of signage, visual connections, and pedestrian engagement opportunities means that few drivers acknowledge the garage as a convenient alternative. The garage's resulting financial struggles—more than a half million dollar deficit in each of the last three years—could be mitigated by better integration into Downtown, Canal District, and Shrewsbury Street parking networks. Graphic visualizations and maps within the various garages that inform and direct visitors to surrounding destinations may improve the context of the garages and help promote more economic spinoff. Integrating parking—on-street and off-street—into a Complete Streets plan with enhanced pedestrian connections via sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, and traffic buffering, would improve the connection between parking garages and the surrounding neighborhoods. As new buildings and activity centers rise in the Downtown, new, walkable routes will also arise allowing for parking to exist farther afield from a driver's ultimate destination.

Worcester needs a master plan for its public parking system—one that addresses structure, supply, demand, fares, technology, design, connectivity, etc. In a recently initiated effort, the City is working with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission on a Downtown Parking and Transit Study.

In addition to identifying current conditions and outstanding maintenance needs, the study must focus on creating an improved customer experience. The new Parking Division should work closely with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and Discover Central Massachusetts, and their respective memberships, to identify new opportunities to market the convenience of Worcester's parking garages to Downtown's activity centers. The potential of a Transportation Management Association—a non-profit entity focused on supporting sustainable commuter alternatives—should be explored by the local business community. Boston has used these types of organizations successfully to advocate for the consideration of economic vitality in public infrastructure planning.

Currently, users are not paying full fare for the parking they have, let alone the parking they desire. Although there will be initial costs and increased rates, improvement in the system and delivery of services, as part of an overall Downtown development strategy, will increase demand and offset the overall burden.

Parking does not create a vibrant Downtown. It can support one, however. For Worcester to succeed, it must organize its operations so that parking is not just a place to stop, but a tool for moving the city forward.

# Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

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