

## 9. PUBLIC PARKING

### 9.1 Downtown Public Parking

#### 9.1.1 Public Parking Supply

Downtown Sarnia currently has 515 public off-street parking spaces in the following locations, plus private spaces in the Bayside Centre made available for public hourly and monthly permit parking:

#### **Exhibit 9.1 - Existing Downtown Public Parking Spaces**

Public Lot	# of Spaces
Charlotte Street Lot	70
Front Street Lot	100
Lochiel Street Lot	20
Parkway Lot	39
Vendome Lot	68
Victoria Street Lot	126
CNR Lot	60
Julia Street Lot	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>515</b>

The downtown area also includes approximately 500 on-street parking spaces. One of the questions posed to the TMP has been whether this existing supply is adequate to meet downtown parking demand. This is an important question because an undersupply of parking does not support downtown business, while an oversupply lowers the value of the parking spaces and competes directly with transit use to and from the downtown, and the future transit use targets included in the Transit Master Plan.

A random survey was conducted of downtown business owners and staff on June 5, 2013. In terms of parking supply, 19 of 21 respondents said there is not enough on-street parking in the downtown to meet demand. Another 13 of 21 said there is not enough off-street parking in the public lots, but 12 of 21 thought these lots are conveniently located to serve downtown businesses.

The conclusion is that the City's downtown parking supply is adequate to meet current demand based on observation of parking lot occupancy and utilization during typical weekdays and weekends. However, the supply of on-street parking is limited by available street frontage and regulations on the location of parking stalls. The off-street parking supply, while well located in different parts

of the downtown, is sensitive to desirable walking distances and loss of spaces through property development.

The first important recommendation this TMP makes regarding the downtown parking supply is that the city ensure that equilibrium of downtown parking spaces is maintained. This means that any significant loss of off-street parking spaces, defined as more than 20% of a lots supply, should be countered with the provision of make-up parking located as close as possible to the lost parking. This can be done in three ways in order to maintain the parking supply equilibrium:

- the City purchase or lease property for this make-up parking;
- the City enter into an agreement with the developer responsible for the lost parking supply to make up this loss by a corresponding increase in the development-related parking supply beyond that required by the City's Zoning Bylaw; and/or
- the City accept cash-in-lieu of parking as allowed by the Official Plan to maintain a parking reserve fund for the supply and management of public off-street parking.

### **9.1.2 Free Public Parking**

In addition to the question of downtown parking supply, the cost of this parking has also been an issue. The June 5, 2013 downtown merchant survey was split 10 to 11 on whether the existing two hour free on-street parking limit is sufficient. However, all respondents felt that this two hour free limit during the day needs to be maintained, plus the free after 6:00 p.m. and on weekends parking. Furthermore, the survey found that most respondents felt the current \$0.50/hour cost in off-street lots is reasonable. So the two main parking cost issues are the free parking time limit, and the actual price of parking as discussed next.

### **9.1.3 On-Street Parking Time Limit**

Regarding the free parking time limit, the TMP supports those merchants who feel the City should maintain the weekday two hour on-street free limit, and does not recommend extending this to three hours as others have suggested. This is because on-street parking is the premier, most convenient parking available in the downtown. It provides the best service to users of the downtown, and so parking costs and limits should be used to maximize the turnover of on-street parking stall so that it can be available to the maximum number of users in a day. Extending the free parking to three hours would have a number of detrimental consequences as seen in other cities that have tried this approach:

- Extended free on-street parking will be used by downtown business staff. This is often indicated early in the morning when downtown on-street parking spaces are occupied but business have not opened;

- Three free hours makes reparking easier for staff and customers who want to park on the street. The principle behind short-term parking in a downtown is that if a person needs to park for more than two hours, they should park off-street in a lot; and
- Chalking tires is a common way of managing on-street parking time limits, but cars can still be moved and reparked. In order to effectively prevent reparking, the City would need to purchase advanced handheld tracking and recording equipment to better manage the parking time limit.

Maintaining the two hour limit as a uniform duration on all downtown parking meters is also recommended, rather than using different time limits in different parts of the downtown. This maintains a more consistent and clear on-street parking system and reduces user confusion.

Another potential way to provide free on-street parking in the downtown involves a parking token program where merchants would buy tokens at a discount rate, then give them to customers as they see fit. Since the City has no on-street parking meters, these tokens could be used for off-street parking, or implemented if parking meters are introduced in the future. A parking token program could be effective at encouraging return visits to the downtown, and is used in some cities such as Oshawa and Oakville.

#### **9.1.4 Public Parking Rates**

Setting the price of parking involves more than just revenue generation because it can address a number of transportation objectives. It can be implemented as a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategy to reduce vehicle traffic and encourage use of alternative travel modes. The price of parking also forms part of a parking management strategy to reduce parking problems in specific areas such as downtowns. Finally, the pricing is typically used by municipalities and developers to recover some of the capital and maintenance costs of their parking facilities.

In most cities today, the emphasis is no longer on minimizing the cost of parking. Instead, a number of other basic factors are commonly being used to set responsive, effective parking prices and meet related transportation objectives, including:

- Manage and price the most convenient parking to favour priority users. Charge higher rates and use shorter parking periods for the most convenient parking spaces, usually on-street to increase turnover;
- Improve parking methods by using electronic pricing systems that accommodate various payment methods (i.e. cash, credit card, debit card) to allow motorists to pay just for the time they need;
- Most municipalities now avoid discounts for long-term parking such as 'early-bird' rates and cheap monthly rates; and

- Always set parking prices to equal or exceed transit fares. Unfortunately this is not happening in Sarnia where a monthly parking pass in the downtown city lots is \$33.90-\$44.64 depending on the lot, but the monthly transit pass is \$66.00.

One way to determine if the City’s current parking rates are appropriate is to compare them to other similar sized cities as follows:

**Exhibit 9.2 - Comparison of Parking Rates**

City (population)	Sarnia (73,000)	Sudbury (158,000)	Windsor (216,500)	Kitchener (205,000)	Guelph (116,000)	Kingston (117,000)
Public On-Street	\$0 free 2 hrs, after 6p.m. and Saturday	\$1.00/hr	\$1.25/hr	\$1.25/hr	\$1.50/hr	\$1-\$1.50/hr
Public Off-Street to 6 p.m. Monthly	\$0.50/hr \$36.73-\$44.64/Month	\$1.00/hr \$30-\$65/Month	\$1.00/hr \$22.60-\$67.80/Month	-- \$69-\$125/Month	-- \$20-\$105/Month	\$1.00/hr \$45.60-\$97/Month

The conclusion reached from these comparisons is that the free two hour on-street parking in Sarnia is somewhat unique when many comparable cities are charging at least \$1.00/hour. Similarly, the off-street monthly rates in downtown Sarnia are at the low end of other municipal monthly rates, as is the Bayside Centre rate of \$25/month for outdoor and \$55/month for indoor parking. This does not mean that this TMP automatically recommends increasing parking rates in downtown Sarnia, but it does highlight that the current rates are at the low end of the range of rates charged by the other cities. This means that the downtown Sarnia rates already provide an advantage for Sarnia downtown parkers compared to other cities.

**9.2 Parking Enforcement**

**9.2.1 Infraction Fines**

Almost all responders to the June 2013 downtown merchant parking survey felt that the level of parking enforcement in the downtown is too strict. The City’s Bylaw Enforcement staff issue parking infraction tickets as a way of managing the downtown parking supply. A comparison of some typical infraction fines is provided as follows:

### Exhibit 9.3 - Comparison of Parking Fines

Infraction	Sarnia	Sudbury	Windsor	Kitchener	Guelph	Kingston
Expired Meter	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$15	\$20	\$25
Accessible Parking	\$300	\$300	\$350	\$300	\$300	\$300
Parking In Loading Zone or Bus Stop	\$20-\$30	\$21	\$35	\$40	\$40	\$30

Based on this comparison, it appears the set fines for parking infractions in Sarnia are average compared to other jurisdictions. It is important that the fines remain reasonable because if they are too low, some motorists may not follow the regulations and simply treat the fines as a parking fee. However, they should also not be too high to be considered excessive, unfair and a detriment to downtown business vitality. The rule of thumb that the City can use is that the greater the difference between the parking rate and cost of a fine, the less chance of the parker deciding to take a risk and let the meter expire, or risk other violations.

#### 9.2.2 Ticketing Grace Period

The image of parking enforcement with the public and downtown businesses can be enhanced through the application of a grace period option before issuing tickets, where possible. This approach would have the enforcement officer delay issuing a ticket, for a time-related infraction only, when a short delay (i.e. maximum 10 minutes) is feasible. Where feasible, a grace period becomes an enforcement practice including first issuing a warning notice, followed by a ticket following the grace period.

A parking grace period is typically less than 10 minutes over the time limit or the period just becomes extended free parking. It also requires an enforcement practice that allows enforcement staff to return to graced parked vehicles within maximum 10 minutes to see if the vehicle has moved. With the manual enforcement practice used in Sarnia that covers large enforcement areas in the downtown, providing a short parking grace period is not feasible to manage,

### 9.3 Accessible Parking

Availability of accessible parking can be a major issue for people with mobility disabilities, but was not specifically identified as a downtown Sarnia issue in developing this TMP. However, under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and actions of the Sarnia Accessibility Advisory Committee (SAAC), accessible parking is required in the downtown. The AODA includes regulation for the provision of accessible parking spaces in Ontario. In addition, the following accessibility recommendations are made for Sarnia in general, and specifically for the downtown:

- Allocate 2% of downtown on-street parking to accessible parking through the signage and geometric design of accessible parking stall. The SAAC should be consulted in selecting the location of these accessible spaces;
- Also consult with SAAC in developing a snow removal strategy in the downtown that priorities access for the disabled, for example to public buildings and bus stops; and
- Work to identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers along all public streets and in public parking lots.

## 9.4 Zoning Bylaw Provisions

Parking requirements in the city overall, and specifically in the downtown are regulated by Section 3.37 of the Sarnia Zoning Bylaw. The Bylaw waives parking requirements in the 'D' Downtown Zones except for multiple use apartment dwellings, and the TMP strongly supports this provision as a TDM-related initiative supporting use of alternatives modes to and from the downtown.

It is also recommended that once the next mandatory five-year review is conducted on the City's Official Plan, the City review the minimum parking space requirements and parking space dimensions in the Zoning Bylaw to ensure they support the city's TDM objectives (i.e. do not result in excess parking supply) and reflect changing automobile designs regarding vehicle dimensions and use of alternative fuel sources (i.e. electric charging stations). A basic comparison of parking provisions in the Sarnia Zoning Bylaw as shown below suggests that in some cases, the City should consider updating specific land use provisions that significantly differ from the norm today, or at least reaffirm the Sarnia provisions that differ significantly:

Land Use Example	Sarnia	Kitchener	Windsor	Milton
Residential – single, duplex, townhouse	1.5/unit	1.0/unit	1.0/unit	2.0/unit
Convenience Retail	1/20m <sup>2</sup>	1/20m <sup>2</sup>	1/22.5m <sup>2</sup>	1/20m <sup>2</sup>
Elementary School	1.5/classrm	1.0/classrm	1.5/classrm	2.0/classrm
Financial Establishment	1/20m <sup>2</sup>	1/28m <sup>2</sup>	1/45m <sup>2</sup>	1/20m <sup>2</sup>
Office	1/30m <sup>2</sup>	1/28m <sup>2</sup>	1/45m <sup>2</sup>	1/30m <sup>2</sup>
Personal Services	1/20m <sup>2</sup>	1/40m <sup>2</sup>	1/22.5m <sup>2</sup>	1/22.5m <sup>2</sup>
Restaurant	1.4.5m <sup>2</sup>	1/7.5m <sup>2</sup>	1/7.5m <sup>2</sup>	1/9m <sup>2</sup>

In addition, the City should include bicycle parking provisions in the Zoning Bylaw. Suggested minimum requirements are offered as follows:

Land Use	Minimum Bicycle Parking Spaces
Dwelling, Apartment	0.2 space/unit
Dwelling, Retirement	0.1 space/unit
Elementary and Secondary Schools	5% of the required parking spaces
All other Commercial, Employment and Institutional Uses	3% of the required parking spaces

The parking space dimensions included in the Zoning Bylaw were also review in terms of today’s best practices, and found to be comparable to other cities. Therefore, the only other recommendation this TMP makes regarding parking provisions in the Zoning Bylaw is to consider provisions that allow for reduction in parking requirements. This is already done through the waiving of parking requirements in the ‘D’ Downtown Zones except for multiple use apartment dwellings. Further parking reductions across the City can be provided through shared parking opportunities, and parking reductions (i.e. 10-30%) for non-residential uses and mixed use developments. Potential parking reduction is intended to support Transportation Demand Management in a city.

## 9.5 Public Parking Management

### 9.5.1 Area Permit Parking

In some areas of the City, special provisions may have to be applied for the management of public parking in order to avoid any negative impact of inappropriate parking. One good example in Sarnia involves Bluewater Health (the Hospital). The Hospital must generate its own parking revenue to support patient programs and services, and so charges visitors \$1.25 for the first half hour and \$1.50 for each subsequent hour up to a maximum daily cost of \$7.50 with no in-out privileges.

While there is an ample supply of surface and underground parking at the Hospital for visitors and staff, some surrounding area property owners have noted concern that Hospital parking will spill over onto nearby streets to avoid the on-site rates. To help prevent this, the City has instituted No Parking/No Stopping provisions on most of the surrounding streets in close proximity to the Hospital, with a two hour limit on other nearby streets.

Enforcement of these on-street parking limits should control any Hospital-related parking on the street. However, if City enforcement and surrounding property owner complaints suggest that Hospital-related parking has in fact spilled over onto surrounding streets, then a more effective parking management option to control this would be to establish and enforce a residential parking permit program on blocks surrounding the Hospital. With this type of program, parking would be restricted on all streets in the designated permit parking area except for permit holders.

A residential parking permit program involves issuing parking passes to residents in a designated program area that allows them to park on the street. These stickers are usually provided annually based on the number of vehicles registered to a particular address within the permit area. Any parked vehicle within the program areas that does not display a pass is automatically ticketed.

As with most parking permit programs, a residential permit program must be actively enforced to be effective. However, the enforcement can be relatively straightforward to manage on foot. Management of public parking on commercial properties for use of customers and clients only can also be enforced by property owners through observation and reporting.

### **9.5.2 Improve Wayfinding and Signage**

A comprehensive, uniform wayfinding and signage program for the City's downtown parking facilities can help inform drivers of parking options and reduce any confusion about payment and restrictions. This includes maintaining common city parking lot signage with information about rates and restrictions. Overall, wayfinding in downtown Sarnia can be further improved to:

- Be more attractive and standardized – creating an 'identity' that draws attention to municipal parking option information;
- Clearly identify lots where parking is available (it is estimated that up to 15% of the traffic volumes in a typical urban downtown is hunting for a parking space). Also this information should clearly identify what parking is available for the general public and what is reserved for monthly parking so as to avoid confusion and unnecessary ticketing;
- Provide clear information on payment and policies. This is especially important for the maximum 2-hour on-street parking limit;
- Provide directions to nearby attractions, destinations and alternative parking lots in the downtown; and
- Design these signs to improve the downtown environment.

### **9.5.3 Promotion of Downtown Parking**

In some ways, downtown Sarnia is at a disadvantage compared to other cities in not having a downtown Business Improvement Association (BIA). Most BIAs act as a promoter of their downtown and the features it offers, including parking information. The Sarnia Parking Authority website provides basic information about the lot names and locations, but more can be provided to better promote these lots. This can include:

- A more user friendly map of each downtown public lot with accessible parking;
- Downtown on and off-street prices and regulations;
- Additional information on monthly parking availability;



- A link to the City's parking bylaws and related policies;
- A direct link to contact information; and
- Web link to sites of alternative transportation options – Sarnia Transit, carpools and employee rideshare programs, bikeways and trails).

#### **9.5.4 Parking For Veterans**

Some Canadian cities provide free public parking for veterans. If Sarnia wishes to institute a similar practice as recognition of service for Canada, a pilot program can be implemented, with eligibility based on the Ontario veterans license plate. If a pilot program is initiated, it should be for one year and allow two hours of free parking at any municipal on-street or off-street parking space for any vehicle with the Ontario veteran license plate.

Enforcement if this program would not be a significant burden since the City already conducts visual inspections of parked vehicles.