



DATE: January 27, 2025

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

FROM: Bjorn Gripenburg, MCRP – Transportation Planner, Public Works Department (PWD)
Jeff Stutsman, PE, TE – Deputy Director of Operations, PWD
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SUBJECT: Recommendation to Receive an Update on Data Collection Efforts for the Downtown Area Parking Management Plan (Under Development) and Provide Feedback on Potential Parking and Curb Management Strategies and Next Steps

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council receive an update on data collection efforts for the Downtown Area Parking Management Plan (under development) and provide feedback on potential parking and curb management strategies and next steps.

BACKGROUND

As the City strives to promote economic development and establish a framework for future growth within the City's downtown area in accordance with local, regional, and state policy, parking and ease of access frequently come up as top priorities for community members and downtown stakeholders. In 2023, a multi-disciplinary team of City staff from Public Works, Community Development, Economic Development and Open Government, and Police began developing a scope of work for a plan that would produce a clear understanding of existing on-street and off-street parking utilization, as well as other curb uses, engage the community, and identify strategies to optimize parking and curb utilization in support of a thriving downtown.

The City secured a \$100,000 Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) grant to develop the Downtown Area Parking Management Plan (Plan), demonstrating our commitment to data-driven solutions for parking and curb use. MTC hired TYLin Group, a global engineering and planning consulting firm with expertise in urban transportation challenges, including parking and curb management, to assist the City with these efforts.

Some important key terms used throughout this staff report include:

“Parking management” broadly refers to any actions that can improve parking availability by:

- 1) improving transportation options, thereby reducing car dependency and parking demand,
- 2) creating more frequent parking turnover using time limits and/or metered parking,
- 3) promoting or incentivizing long-term parking in lower-demand areas to free up high-demand spots, and/or
- 4) increasing parking supply through the creation of additional parking spaces (on and/or off-street).

“Curb management” or **“curb uses”** refer to the various possible uses for curb space, which may include parking (of varying time limits), commercial loading, passenger loading, prohibited parking areas (red curb), on-street bike parking (bike corrals), outdoor seating/dining (parklets), etc.

In recent years, the City and partner transit agencies have placed emphasis on improving transportation options by making walking, bicycling, and transit safer and more appealing for those able and willing to use these modes in order to reduce congestion and the associated greenhouse gas emissions. Improved transportation options can reduce parking demand by making it easier and safer for visitors and employees to get downtown without a car. Recent efforts include launching LumaGo microtransit service, partnering with Sonoma County Transportation Authority to launch Redwood Bikeshare, and enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure connecting to and through downtown.

Downtown Area Parking Management Plan Goals and Scope

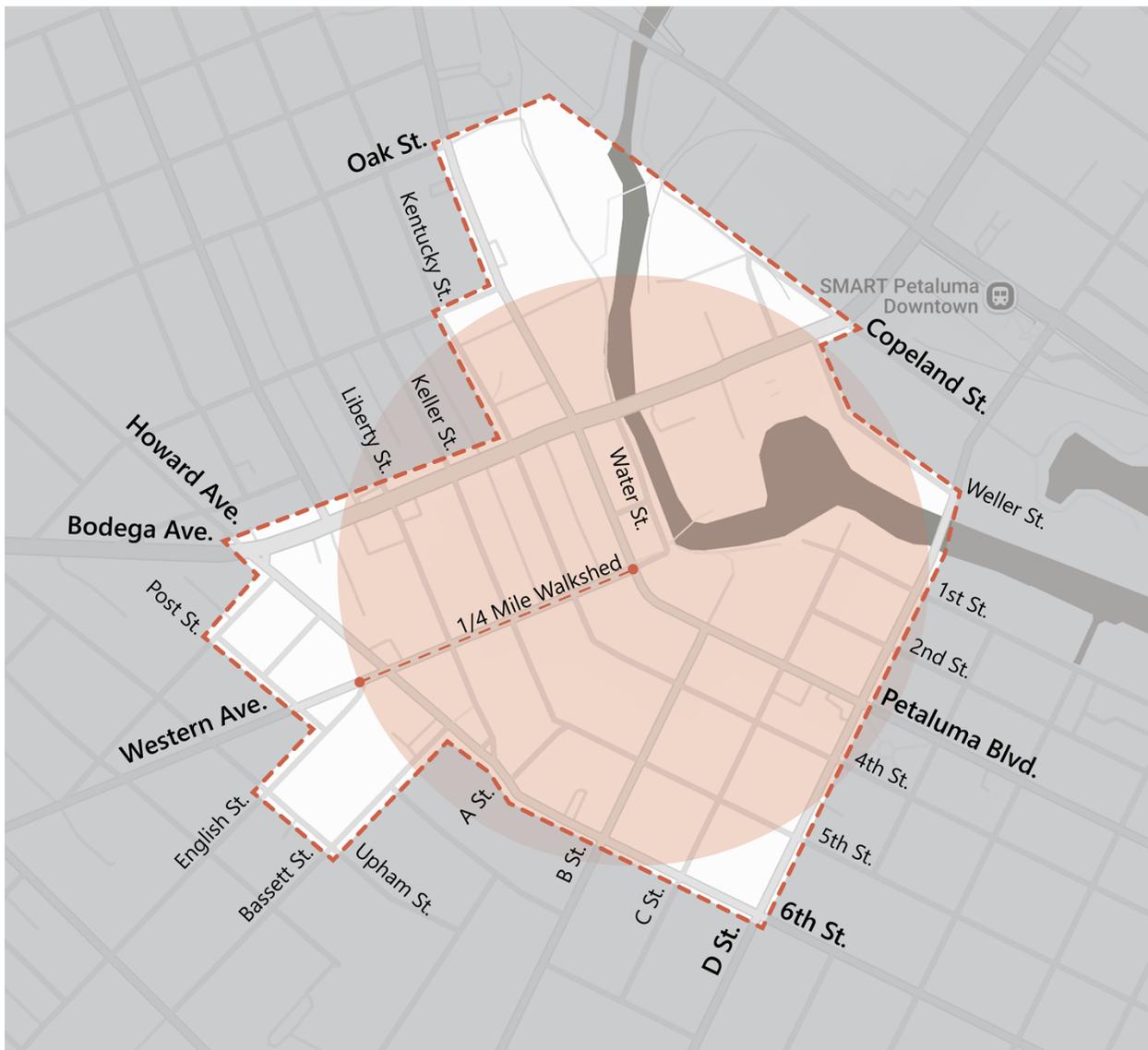
As stated above, the Plan aims to produce a clear understanding of existing on-street and off-street parking utilization, as well as other curb uses, engage the community, and identify strategies to optimize parking and curb utilization in support of a thriving downtown. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of existing conditions, as well as potential challenges and opportunities, TYLin’s scope of work included the following data collection efforts:

- 1) **Study Area Parking & Curb Inventory:** Compile an inventory of public on-street and off-street parking, as well as other curb uses, within the study area.
- 2) **Parking Utilization Analysis:** Conduct occupancy counts of public on-street and off-street parking throughout the week, including at typical peak times. Conduct an assessment on a busy block within the two-hour time limit zone to better understand how often, on average, spaces turn over. Use aerial imagery to better understand utilization of private off-street parking lots that cannot be manually counted.
- 3) **Travel Behavior Report:** Conduct surveys, workshops, and focus groups to better understand current travel behavior by those who live in, work in, and visit downtown, as well as barriers to using other modes of travel.

The desired outcomes from this effort are as follows:

- Ease downtown congestion and pain points around parking, loading, deliveries, etc.; optimize curb space for various uses,
- Help guide investments in downtown parking & mobility options,
- Inform future development requirements,
- Review and, if needed, update parking fees and regulations,
- Identify actions needed to comply with state and regional policies, and
- Create a vibrant and safe downtown that is accommodating to residents, visitors, employees, and businesses.

The project team developed a study area, seeking to capture areas around downtown with known opportunities or challenges. The boundaries of the study area are shown in the image below. A quarter-mile (five minute) walking distance from the intersection of Western Avenue and Petaluma Boulevard is shown, demonstrating the high degree of walkability in the study area.



DISCUSSION

Workshop Goals and Overview

Through this workshop, the project team aims to 1) come away with a shared understanding of existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities, 2) seek initial feedback on potential parking and curb management strategies/actions, and 3) receive feedback on next steps, including stakeholder outreach and education.

The workshop will focus primarily on sharing key findings from the parking utilization analysis, downtown business and property manager focus group, and employee and visitor surveys. A brief preview of potential strategies/actions will also be included. The project team plans to re-engage downtown stakeholders and the broader community to seek feedback on a comprehensive set of strategies/actions before returning to City Council later this year for additional feedback and consideration of Plan approval.

What Does Optimal Parking Utilization Look Like?

Industry best practices indicate that 85 percent is the ideal parking occupancy, as this percentage demonstrates economic activity while also ensuring an appropriate number of spaces are available (roughly three out of every 20 spaces, or at least one space on every block) to minimize “circling” for parking, a significant source of downtown congestion.

Executive Summary

Community feedback and surveys highlight the importance of downtown parking to residents, visitors, and businesses, with concerns often centered around availability and convenience. However, data collected through this study reveals that parking utilization in downtown Petaluma rarely exceeds the industry-recommended 85 percent occupancy threshold. While there is higher demand for on-street parking in the downtown core, public and private off-street parking facilities, as well as nearby streets outside the core area, often have available capacity, even during peak times. This indicates that opportunities exist to optimize parking and curb use, such as improving turnover, encouraging the use of off-street and long-term parking, and enhancing mobility options, rather than expanding parking capacity through costly new lots or garages. Additionally, challenges associated with delivery, loading, and short-term parking persist, reflecting the evolving needs of businesses and visitors in the age of online retail, food delivery, and ride-hailing services. These findings suggest a path forward focused on maximizing existing resources, aligning with the City's broader goals for walkable, vibrant, and efficient land use in the downtown area.

Data Collection & Findings

The project team employed a comprehensive approach to assess parking and curb utilization in downtown Petaluma. They conducted parking counts during four initial time periods and supplemented with two additional counts following focus group discussion. To gain qualitative insights they held a focus group with business representatives and property managers.

Additionally, they conducted two surveys—a visitor survey and a downtown employee survey—to gather diverse perspectives and feedback on travel and parking behavior and preferences.

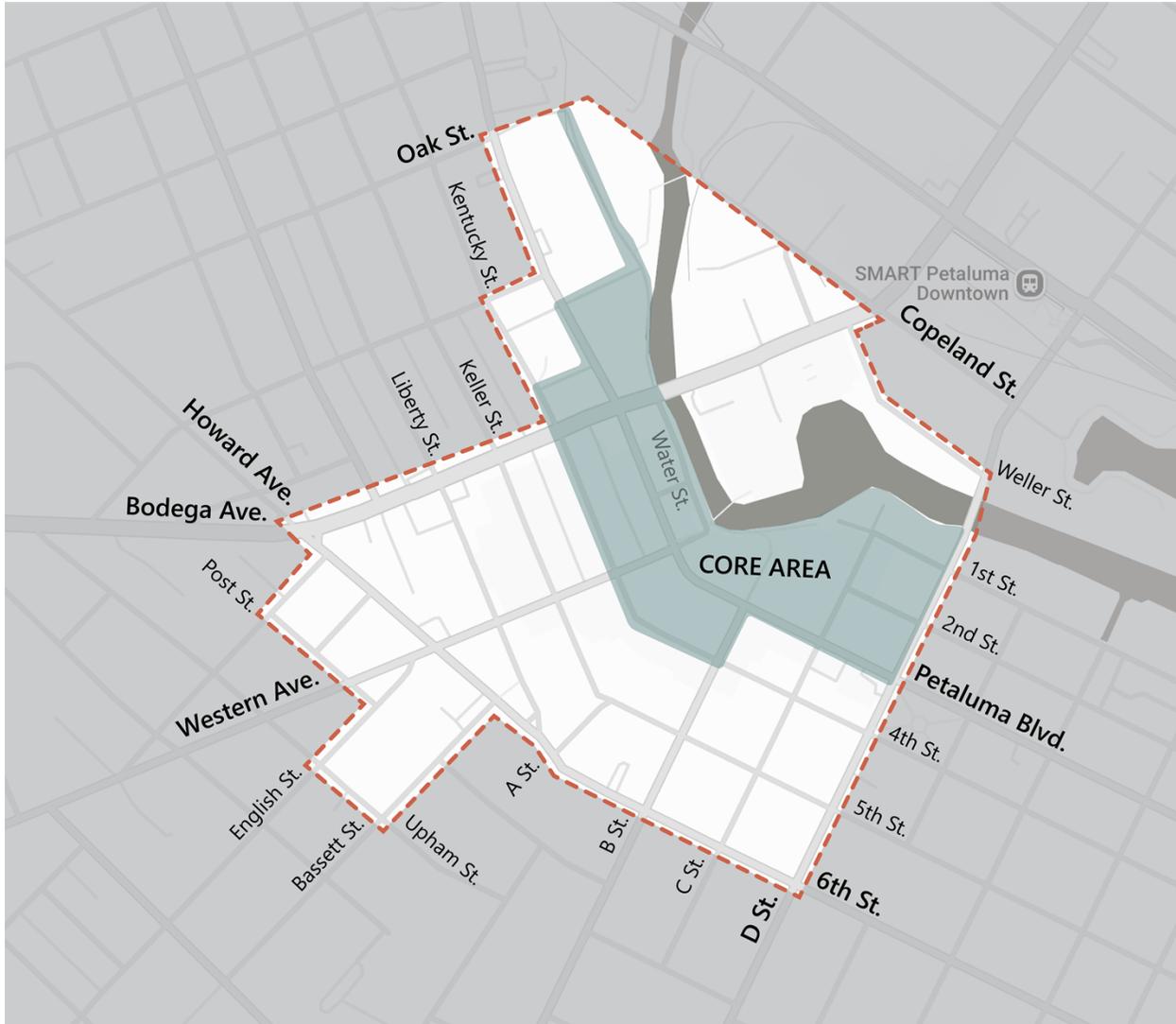
Parking and Curb Utilization

A sub-consultant initially collected four parking counts of all public on-street and off-street parking in the study area on Friday, June 21, 2024 from 7-10 AM, 3-6 PM, and 6-9 PM and Saturday, June 22 from 1-4 PM. Following review and feedback from a focus group with downtown business representatives and property managers, additional counts were collected on Wednesday, October 23, 2024 from 11 AM-4 PM and Thursday, October 24 from 11 AM-4 PM. The goal for these varying times and days was to gain an understanding of the way parking demand fluctuates throughout the day and week.

Utilization data collected from the dates and times is summarized below. The “**downtown core**” noted in the third column is a sub-area of the study area where higher on-street parking demand was observed across all counts. It includes Theatre Square, the Petaluma Mill, Petaluma Boulevard between D Street and Prospect Street, B Street between 2nd Street and 4th Street, 4th Street/Kentucky Street between B Street and Mary Street, and Water Street between Martha Street and Western Avenue. A map with the boundaries of the downtown core area is included below.

Time Period	On-Street Utilization	On-Street Utilization: Downtown Core	Public Off-Street Utilization
Parking Capacity*	1,333	552	858
Wednesday 11AM to 4PM (October 23, 2024)	64%	79%	54%
Thursday 11AM to 4PM (October 24, 2024)	61%	70%	57%
Friday 7AM to 10 AM (June 21, 2024)	60%	72%	52%
Friday 3PM to 6PM (June 21, 2024)	62%	82%	60%
Friday 6PM to 9PM (June 21, 2024)	68%	81%	44%
Saturday 1PM to 4 PM (June 22, 2024)	69%	92%	38%

**Slight variations in the number of spaces across counts due to roadway changes. Differences are minor.*



The two largest parking facilities downtown are the Keller Street Garage and Theatre Square Garage, which combined account for nearly one-third of the study area's public parking supply. On-street occupancy in the downtown core area was observed above 80 percent in three out of six counts, but did not exceed 80 percent in either garage at those times. The only time occupancy was observed above 80 percent in either garage was in the Keller Street Garage during the Thursday afternoon count. Maps showing occupancy rates for each count are included in the workshop presentation associated with this staff report (**Attachment 1, slides 18-23**).

To get an idea of utilization of sizeable private off-street lots within the study area that could not be manually counted, the project team also looked at aerial imagery from Wednesday, June 26, 2024 at 1 PM and a combined image from Saturday, July 8, 2023 at 5 PM and Tuesday, July 4, 2023 at 3 PM. While this methodology does not provide the full private parking inventory, the lots counted provide a total of 1,000 spaces. Overall occupancy for the Wednesday afternoon count was 60 percent, while the combined weekend/holiday count was 26 percent.

Lastly, a dwell time/turnover analysis was performed on the block of Kentucky Street between Western Avenue and Washington Street during the day Friday, June 21, 2024, Wednesday, October 23, and Thursday, October 24. During the analysis, personal automobiles were parked, on average, for just over one hour. The analysis also showed a significant range in delivery times, with loading occurring for as little as a few minutes up to 30 minutes. Several vehicles were observed parking in red zones, illustrating a need for additional loading or short-term parking spaces.

Business Representative and Property Manager Focus Group

The project team held a focus group with Petaluma Downtown Association leadership, business representatives, and property managers to share data collection findings and seek feedback on parking and curb use challenges. Key takeaways from the discussion are outlined below:

- Free parking and turnover make it easy for patrons to visit downtown businesses.
- 2-hour time limits are challenging for employees and do not encourage patrons to linger.
- There is a need for more short-term parking and loading zones.
- Concerns about personal safety discourage garage use for some.
- There is interest in how LumaGo and public transit can help alleviate parking demand, especially for employees.
- There is interest in finding opportunities to use underutilized private parking lots to increase parking capacity for downtown visitors and employees.

As noted above, the group also requested additional parking data collection to capture typical mid-week conditions. Wednesday and Thursday counts were collected following the discussion in response to the group's feedback.

Visitor and Employee Surveys

Visitor and employee surveys were distributed to better understand current travel and parking behavior, barriers to car-free modes of travel, and feedback about parking and curb use challenges. The visitor survey received 617 responses and the employee survey received 70 responses. Preliminary takeaways are included below, although it should be noted that the survey closed the week of January 6 and analysis is ongoing.

Of those who responded to the surveys:

- 60 percent of visitors say they typically use street parking when they drive downtown.
- 70 percent of visitors find it moderately to very difficult to find parking.
- 62 percent of visitors say safety concerns are somewhat to very challenging in garages.
- Visitors say primary barriers to travelling downtown are traffic congestion (33%) and limited parking availability (27%).
- 85 percent of employees who responded arrive in the morning and leave before 8 PM.
- 40 percent of employees park within the 2-hour zone and move their cars during their shift.
- 85 percent of employees note that parking as close as possible to their workplace is somewhat or very important.

- 58 percent of employees who currently drive alone are interested in other transportation options, with transit being the leading car-free mode employees are interested in, at 38 percent.

Summary of Key Findings

- There is high demand for on-street parking in the downtown core and demand generally decreases around the study area periphery, particularly on the blocks including and south of Keller/5th Street.
- 2-hour time limits are effective at creating regular turnover.
- Public off-street parking facilities have available capacity, even when nearby street parking is in high demand. Private off-street parking facilities also appear to have available capacity, although making these spaces available to other land uses or the public requires willingness from the property owner to do so.
- Many employees park in 2-hour spaces and move their cars, rather than in long-term spaces more suitable for daylong use. There is interest in employee permits that would enable employees to park once for the entirety of their shifts.
- There are challenges associated with delivery, loading, and short-term parking, especially with the proliferation of online retail, food delivery, and ride-hailing.

Potential Strategies/Actions

The project team will introduce several potential strategies and actions to help improve parking and curb utilization, outlined below, for consideration at the workshop. Upcoming engagement efforts with downtown stakeholders and the community will be used to develop a comprehensive set of prioritized strategies/actions, ranging from near to long-term implementation. These strategies/actions fall under five categories:

- 1) Improve Transportation Options:** Reduce parking demand by continuing to invest in and promote car-free mobility options, seeking to make walking, bicycling, and transit safe and convenient for those willing and able to use car-free modes.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Increase transit service to connect downtown employees and visitors with satellite parking areas and transit hubs
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to and through downtown
- Implement occasional car-free events in certain parts of downtown to promote activity and encourage visitors to use car-free modes

- 2) Create More Frequent Turnover:** Maximize economic productivity and reduce congestion by ensuring high-demand on-street parking areas are utilized primarily by patrons and see frequent turnover using time limits and/or metered parking.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Implement more short-term parking in the downtown (<30 minutes) in response to business feedback
- Consider enforcing time limits on Sundays

3) Promote Long-Term Parking Options: In support of creating more frequent turnover in high-demand areas, redistribute demand and reduce congestion by promoting or incentivizing use of long-term areas, such as off-street lots and garages, as well as streets outside the downtown core.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Improve lighting and security in the Keller Street Garage
- Improve wayfinding to garages and lots, including through real-time signage indicating number of spaces available
- Implement an employee permit system, with permit areas located in garages or outside downtown core streets
- Increase or remove time limits on streets with lower utilization
- Create satellite parking areas linked to downtown by transit/microtransit and shared bikes and scooters

4) Improve Loading Access and Safety: Minimize conflicts from loading by expanding designated locations and, if feasible, hours for certain types of deliveries.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Implement time-of-day restrictions for vehicles above a certain size
- Increase the availability of loading zones, which can be utilized for commercial loading/deliveries, passenger loading, etc.
- Consider designated pickup and/or waiting areas for ride-hail and food delivery drivers

5) Expand Parking Supply: Expand parking supply by reconfiguring existing streets or creating new off-street parking opportunities.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Promote ‘shared parking’ opportunities between private property owners and businesses
- Explore leasing private parking for public use
- Explore opportunities to add angled parking to streets with excess width

It should be noted that constructing new off-street parking carries significant capital costs. Not including land costs, capital costs are estimated at \$3,000 per space for surface lots and \$35,000 per space for garages.

Paid Parking Analysis

The project team also reviewed existing parking fees and analyzed comparable and nearby cities to offer potential fee structures and revenue estimates for City Council’s consideration. Paid parking is used by many cities as a tool to incentivize car-free travel, parking in long-term/lower-demand areas, and turnover within high-demand areas.

The City currently charges the following annual fees for the use of public parking:

- On-Street Residential Parking Permits: \$28
- 4th & A Street Lot Reserved Parking Permits: \$432
- Keller Street Garage Parking Permits for Hotel Petaluma Guests: \$240

The City is also aware of one private property owner at 200 Kentucky Street who offers paid parking to the public. Prices are \$2 per hour up to two hours, \$7.50 to 1 AM, and \$10 to 7 AM the following day.

North Bay cities that charge for parking include Mill Valley, San Rafael, and Santa Rosa. The table below includes a summary of each city’s parking fees to provide additional context:

City	Days	On-Street Hourly Cost	On-Street Time Limit(s) (Hours)	Off-Street Hourly Cost	Off-Street Time Limits (Hours)	Notes
Mill Valley	Mon-Sun	\$2.50	1, 2	\$1.50	1, 2	Resident Shopper Vehicle Permit (RSVP) allows Mill Valley residents to park for free in metered parking areas for \$75 annually (time limits still apply) 110 designated employee spaces (\$132 per permit)
San Rafael	Mon-Sat	\$1.50	2	\$0.75-1.00	2, 4, 10	Free parking in garages on weekends; lots and streets still paid on Saturday
Santa Rosa	Mon-Sat	\$1.00-1.50	3, 4	\$0.50-1.50	3, 4, 9, unlimited	Garages: first hour free, daily maximum rates, monthly permits (\$62-160), low wage employee permits (\$31)

The project team estimates revenue generated from the 552 on-street parking spaces in the downtown core alone could exceed \$9 million annually, assuming a \$2 hourly cost and 70 percent utilization during paid days and hours (Monday through Saturday, 8 AM-6 PM). Areas outside the downtown core and off-street parking could be charged at lower rates for additional revenue. A

more detailed revenue generation model, as well as capital and ongoing expenses associated with implementing paid parking, can be developed and provided if desired.

If paid parking is considered, staff would recommend the establishment of a Parking Benefit District to ensure revenue is reinvested downtown. If implemented, these funds could be used for capital improvements, with possible uses including street improvements and Keller Street Garage upgrades, as well as ongoing operations, such as increased transit serving downtown and maintenance of downtown parking facilities.

Next Steps

Following the workshop, the project team plans to engage downtown stakeholders and the broader community, then return to City Council later this year with a draft Plan for additional feedback and consideration of adoption. Implementation of most strategies proposed in the Plan are expected to require future City Council approvals.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This agenda item appeared on the City Council’s tentative agenda document at its January 6, 2025 meeting. City Council meetings are publicly noticed.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

City Council reviews and establishes goals and priorities for the upcoming years to help guide workplans for City staff. This year’s goals and priorities were reviewed by City Council during their April 15, 2024 meeting. The Downtown Area Parking Management Plan was included in the City’s Dashboard of City Goals and Milestone 2024-2026 under “Parking Management.”

Additionally, the Capital Improvement Program serves as comprehensive catalog of community needs. The full five-year program is reviewed and the upcoming fiscal year budget is approved each year by Council. The Downtown Area Parking Management Plan was included in the Capital Improvement Program on CIP-90. The full FY2024-2025 Adopted Operating and Capital Improvement Program Budget can be found here: <https://cityofpetaluma.org/documents/fiscal-year-2025-adopted-budget/>

CLIMATE ACTION/SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

The Downtown Area Parking Management Plan aligns with Petaluma’s Blueprint for Climate Action, which outlines strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build resilience, and promote sustainable transportation options. Blueprint Cornerstone Action PM-1 calls for a parking management policy by 2027 to balance supply and demand, reduce demand for parking, and meet target utilization rates. Implementation Action PM-2 calls for reformed parking standards for new development, and PM-3 calls for parking management strategies in transit-oriented and mixed-use areas. These actions support transportation and land use practices that seek to reduce vehicle miles

traveled and lower transportation emissions, which are the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions in Petaluma, at 66.5 percent.¹

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This discussion item is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15378, in that it does not meet CEQA’s definition of a “project,” because no action is being taken and the discussion item does not have the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. Additionally, this item is exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262, which applies to activities related to feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded. Moreover, any actions that result from this Plan will have their own CEQA analysis.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

There are no financial impacts associated with this discussion item. Future actions committing the City to certain strategies will be subject to City Council adoption through the annual Operating and Capital Improvement Program Budget.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Presentation

¹ <https://rcpa.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/RCPA-GHG-Inventory-Update-2022-Full-Report-FINAL-2024-07-08.pdf>