



TRANSIT AND PARKING MEMORANDUM

TO: MAYOR J. LEHMAN AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: B. FORSYTH, DIRECTOR OF TRANSIT AND PARKING STRATEGY

NOTED: B. ARANIYASUNDARAN, DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING

R. JAMES-REID, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ACCESS BARRIE

A. MILLER, GENERAL MANAGER OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

RE: PARKING STRATEGY AND FREE 2 HOUR PARKING PROGRAM

DATE: OCTOBER 8, 2019

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide members of City Building Committee with an interim update on the current free 2 hour parking program and outline the importance of the development of a cohesive parking strategy.

CURRENT PROGRAM – INTERIM STATUS UPDATE:

As part of the construction plan related to Dunlop St from Mulcaster to Owen, staff recommended providing free 2 hour parking in lieu of the spaces that were being occupied from this section of Dunlop Street during construction. There were 24 spaces removed on Dunlop from Owen to Mulcaster and another 14 spaces were dedicated to become a loading/unloading zone for the businesses on Owen St from Dunlop to Collier. The total number of free 2 hour spaces provided on the 4th floor of the parkade is 39.

Council adopted the following motions (19-G-236) to support this strategy:

1. *That two-hour free parking on the fourth floor of the Collier Street Parkade be provided during Phase 1A of the Dunlop Street East Corridor Improvements from Mulcaster Street to Toronto Street.*
2. *That staff in the Engineering Department report back to General Committee whether or not the Program was successful during the 2019 construction period and, if successful that the Program be continued during the subsequent phases of the construction project. (ENG011-19) (File: T05-DUN)*

Since receiving the direction from Council staff have coordinated a communication plan with the BIA to promote this free parking program. The communication plan included the following:

- Signage was posted in and around the parkade, including in the elevator, to ensure people are aware of this parking option. This signage at the Parkade includes interior signs, an outdoor Curbex sign and flags outside the parkade
- Three large Curbex signs promoting the free parking at entry points to downtown.
- Parking info on City's website: barrie.ca/DigDowntown
- Social media posts on City's Twitter and Facebook channels
- Takeover ad on BarrieToday.com on Sept. 6 to promote free parking option
- City media release, BIA media releases
- Radio ads on Rock 95, KOOL FM, Fresh 93.1 and Big 101
- Barrie eDigest – September 2019
- *This Week in Barrie* feature in The Barrie Advance

- Video created and shared on social media and City website to show people how to access the free parking option
- 10,000 rack cards were printed and provided to BIA businesses and placed in City facilities. The BIA also mailed out a large number of the rack cards to homes in the area surrounding downtown.
- Floor decals installed on the 4th floor of the parkade to promote that it's only a 5-minute walk to downtown businesses and restaurants.
- Door decals being installed on the parkade 4th floor doors to remind people to print the Pay n Display receipt and put it on their dashboard to ensure free parking for two hours.
- Flags along Simcoe Road.

Staff have completed utilization counts of the 4th floor of the parkade during the free 2 hour program. To date staff have witnessed peak utilization of at 64%, with average utilization at 35% and a turnover rate of 2.1 hours. Staff plan to continue utilization counts until the end of the construction Phase 1A, and will include this information in a report back to Council with the recommended plan moving forward to future phases.

PARKING STRATEGY:

Since the 2012 Parking Strategy & Rate Review, visitors started paying for parking on the waterfront, surplus municipal parking lots were designated for redevelopment, the new Transportation Master Plan set progressive targets to increase walking, cycling and transit ridership, and the Official Plan Project was launched to design policies that will help accommodate future growth.

These changes could impact demand for parking in the downtown and waterfront areas, so there is a need to refresh the Parking Strategy in order to identify solutions for current parking challenges while also developing a long term, financially sustainable plan that supports city growth over the next 20 years.

There are many stakeholders that have a vested interest in parking, including residents, workers, businesses, and visitors that come to the downtown and waterfront area for both short-term and long-term stays. To ensure the Parking Strategy Update provides relevant and thoughtful recommendations, it was necessary to develop a framework for understanding how parking aligns with Council's Strategic Priorities. Four (4) key areas of focus have been identified and approved as the guiding principles:

1. **Financial Sustainability-** the parking reserve should be sustainable in both the short-term and long-term in order to maintain the level of service to the community and meet financial obligations.
2. **Downtown Enrichment-** parking should support a vibrant downtown and waterfront that are easy to navigate and inviting to residents, visitors, and businesses.
3. **Transportation Diversification-** parking should contribute to the comprehensive transportation initiatives of the City.
4. **Continuous Improvement-** parking should provide a cohesive service that is citizen-driven and future-ready.

By offering a pricing model, such as free parking throughout the entire downtown core, and not considering the impact on a cohesive strategy could provide unfavorable results. Below are some of those examples:

1. Providing free parking is unlikely to achieve the goal of providing easier access for customers to their business. Parking pricing and time limits are tools used to encourage turnover of parking spaces. Turnover is necessary to ensure there is availability for short-term trips, such as popping into a store for a coffee. Preliminary survey data collected for the Parking Strategy Update shows the most common complaint from both the general public and business owners is that is hard to find available parking. Making parking free throughout the downtown would exacerbate this problem by removing the incentives for turnover.



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2. Providing free parking is likely to create competition for parking spaces between short-term and long-term trips because there is no feasible method of differentiating between customers parking for short periods and employees parking for long periods. This is already a known issue in the downtown and it was raised multiple times in the preliminary feedback collected from business owners for the Parking Strategy Update.
3. Free Parking for an extended period of time sets a level of service where it may be difficult to revert back to paid parking following the end of construction, and ultimately hurting the businesses long-term.
4. Parking revenue is used to reinvest into the system to improve the customers experience and include such items as improved wayfinding signage, and technology improvements. Currently the parking rate reserve is anticipated to be in a \$1.2M deficit by the end of 2019 and has an estimated annual deficit of \$600K. The parking strategy will look at funding options to achieve the guiding principle of Financial Sustainability. Providing free parking throughout the entire downtown core for the duration of the construction will reduce revenue by approximately \$150K per month and will put further stress on the parking rate reserve and require the additional long term funding strategies to manage the deficit.
5. Free parking does not support Council's adopted transportation modal share goals of encouraging the growth in Active Transportation and Transit which in turn provides traffic congestion relief, as it does promote the use of the automobile.

Staff are currently working with the IBI Group and engaging with community stakeholders to update the parking strategy with the goal to present the report and recommendations to Council in Q1 2020.