

Town of Lee Downtown Parking Study

DRAFT

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Introduction

A pervasive concern of many municipalities seeking to improve and revitalize their downtowns is the issue of adequate parking. Growth and development over time can often result in physical constraints which may prove to be a challenge in future efforts toward downtown revitalization and development.

As the Town of Lee begins to pursue a downtown revitalization initiative, and as issues regarding traffic flow and capacity are being investigated, concerns have also arisen regarding existing parking conditions and potential increases in future needs. The proximity of the Downtown area to the Massachusetts Turnpike, as well as its position on primary north/south state road Route 20, and its central location close to several major attractions, all contribute to traffic



congestion. Traffic congestion in downtown Lee was identified in both the 2003 Regional Transportation Plan and the 2001 North Central Berkshire Access Study as a priority. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is currently conducting a Lee Area Traffic Study that examines traffic impacts from the intersection with the MassPike through Lee's center.

The same factors that contribute to traffic congestion also factor in funneling large numbers of people through Downtown Lee, creating a basis for shopping, dining, and entertainment business enterprises to thrive. These businesses in turn create needs for parking. Optimization of parking has impacts on business success, and can also contribute to better traffic flow.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission prepared this study at request of the Lee Downtown Task Force. The Task Force was created to investigate community needs and development opportunities, and a first step in this process was to evaluate the current downtown parking situation and to report on problems concerning needs and related issues. This study will address existing parking conditions in the downtown area, including an inventory of the parking supply and a sample of occupancy rates and turnover patterns. It will also provide an overview of some of the actions that may warrant consideration to address current and future parking problems.

Current Conditions

As the question of parking availability is one of supply and demand related to location and time, this analysis includes an inventory of the actual parking supply, and observation of the location, volume and type of use in Lee's Downtown area during peak periods of activity and parking accumulation. The Downtown Lee area extends from Housatonic to Center Streets on Main Street, and includes on-street, off-street, public and private parking areas. Based upon the recommendations of the Downtown Task Force, this more detailed study focused on the

Southern downtown area, from Housatonic and Park Streets to Franklin Street. The inventory of parking facilities within the defined area and the observance of use during peak periods was conducted during late summer 2006. This report summarizes findings and presents appropriate recommendations.

Parking Supply

The initial study area included on-street parking on Main Street from Center to Housatonic Streets, Frank P. Consolati Way and the southernmost block of Railroad Street. The area also included inventories of off-street parking facilities associated with the Airolodi Building, the Town Green, the Post Office, Price Chopper, the Lee Bank “commuter” lot on Park Street, Lee Bank, and the Town Hall Municipal Lot.



Boundaries of Study Area

First, the total number of spaces within the target area was registered. In determining existing capacity off-street and curbside parking was surveyed, including as much information as was available regarding usage restrictions and time limitations. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The ID numbers of off-street facilities are based on parcel numbers obtained by the Town Assessor.

TABLE 1. OFF-STREET PARKING INVENTORY

ID	Name	Location	Total Capacity	Reserved Spaces	Public Spaces	Notes/Restrictions
18A-118(A)	Lee B.3 Frank Commuter Lot	Park Street	22	0	22	no handicapped spaces, all spaces clearly marked except 2, lot must be accessed through Lee Bank parking entrance, no restrictions
18A-118(B)	Lee Bank	75 Park Street	64	0	64	2 handicapped spaces, no restrictions
18A-61(A)	Price Chopper	Park Street section of lot	36	0	36	1 handicapped space, all spaces marked, no restrictions
18A-61(B)	Price Chopper	Main Street section of lot	45	6	39	6 spaces Zabian's Jewelers Customers Only, 2 handicapped spaces
18A-51	Post Office	35 Frank P. Consolati Way	33	0	33	4 handicapped spaces, no restrictions
18A-48, 18A-49	Town Green Lot	Railroad Street	49	0	49	all spaces marked, no restrictions
18A-46	Airoldi Building	Railroad Street	7	0	7	all spaces marked, no restrictions
18A-77A	Municipal Lot	Corner of Park and Main	53	6	47	1 Police Department Parking, 2 Police Vehicles Only, 1 Church Visitor, 1 Church Staff, 1 Pastor, 1 Chamber of Commerce 15 Minute, 3 handicapped spaces
		OFF-STREET TOTAL	309	12	297	

TABLE 2. ON-STREET PARKING INVENTORY

Street	Segment	Side	Estimated Capacity	Restrictions	Type
Frank P. Consolati Way	Railroad Street- End	West	16	2- hour parking	Diagonal
Railroad Street	Eaton-	North	9	none	Parallel
Main Street	Center- Streets School	South	4	none	Parallel
Main Street	School- Streets Ferncliff	South	5	none	Parallel
Main Street	Ferncliff- Streets Academy	South	18	none	Parallel
Main Street	Academy- Streets Franklin	South	21	none	Parallel
Main Street	Franklin- Streets Eaton	South	3	none	Parallel
Main Street	Eaton- Price Chopper Entrance	South	7	none	Parallel
Main Street	Price Chopper Entrance- Park Street	South	7	none	Parallel
Main Street	Municipal entrance- Street Lot Eaton	North	11	One 15 Minute One 2 Hour	2 Parallel, 9 Diagonal
Main Street	Eaton- Streets Franklin	North	7	One 2 Hour	Diagonal
Main Street	Franklin- Streets Academy	North	18	none	Parallel
Main Street	Academy- Streets Ferncliff	North	20	none	Parallel
Main Street	Ferncliff- Streets School	North	5	none	Parallel
Main Street	School- Streets Center	North	15	none	Parallel
ON-STREET TOTAL			166		
OFF-STREET TOTAL			309		
TOTAL OF ALL SPACES			475		

The Town of Lee does not employ the use of either permitted parking or parking meters. In addition, there are very few spaces which have marked restrictions or time limits. Of the 475 total spaces observed in the downtown area, only 31, or 6.5% were marked as having any type of restriction. For the purposes of this study, the capacities noted in Table 2 in areas with unmarked parking spaces are based upon a visual estimate of how many cars could fit in the designated area in addition to the number of cars already parked. Spaces signed and/or painted for handicapped parking were included as part of the total capacity, and were not listed as reserved.



The preliminary study area contains a total of 475 non-residential parking spaces. Of the 475 space total, 201 (47%) are located in private lots, 150 (35%) are on-street curb spaces, and 78 (18%) are located in public lots. This data is represented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. CAPACITY BY TYPE

Parking Type:	Number of Spaces	% of Total
Curb Spaces	166	35%
Public Lot	86	18%
Private Lot	223	47%
Total Spaces:	475	100%
Total Public: (Curb + Public Lot)	252	53%

The Lee Downtown Task Force indicated that the primary area of concern was the South Downtown area. Many restaurants, shops and businesses, as well as the gazebo, town hall and police station, are all located South of Franklin Street. For this reason, several focus areas, consisting of both on-street and off-street parking zones south of the Franklin and Main Street intersection were chosen to be evaluated more closely. In order to measure the balance between

parking supply and demand, actual occupancy and turnover data were collected during peak periods in the late summer season. Surveys were performed on a summer weekday mid-day (August 22) from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, and on an early autumn dinner period (September 28) from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. The focus areas consisted of on-street parking on both sides of Main Street South of Franklin Street, the municipal town hall lot, and both the Park and Main Street sections of the Price Chopper lot. These areas contained a total of 162 spaces, equally divided between public and private parking areas, with each type contributing 81 spaces to the total surveyed stock.

TABLE 4. PARKING OCCUPANCY SUMMARY- AFTERNOON

		11:00-11:30 am		11:30 am-12:00 pm		12:00-12:30 pm		12:30-1:00 pm		1:00-1:30 pm		1:30-2:00 pm		Average	
OFF-STREET	Estimated Capacity	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled
Price Chopper Lot (Park Street Section)	36	21	58%	24	67%	22	61%	27	75%	24	67%	17	47%	23	64%
Price Chopper Lot (Main Street Section)	45	41	91%	49	>100%	48	>100%	50	>100%	45	100%	48	>100%	47	>100%
Municipal Lot	53	41	77%	41	77%	41	77%	34	64%	38	72%	35	66%	38	72%
Subtotal	134	103	77%	114	85%	111	83%	111	83%	107	80%	100	75%	108	81%
ON-STREET															
Main, Franklin-Park (northbound)	10	9	90%	9	90%	12	>100%	8	80%	9	90%	7	70%	9	90%
Main, Franklin-Price Chopper (southbound)	18	11	61%	16	89%	16	89%	15	83%	14	78%	14	78%	14	78%
Subtotal	28	20	71%	25	89%	28	100%	23	82%	23	82%	21	75%	23	82%
Total	162	123	76%	139	86%	139	86%	134	83%	130	80%	121	75%	131	81%

TABLE 5. PARKING OCCUPANCY SUMMARY- EVENING

		5:00-5:30 pm		5:30-6:00 pm		6:00-6:30 pm		6:30-7:00 pm		Average	
OFF-STREET	Estimated Capacity	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled	Cars Parked	% Filled
Price Chopper Lot (Park Street Section)	36	13	36%	21	58%	16	44%	13	36%	16	44%
Price Chopper Lot (Main Street Section)	45	46	>100%	37	82%	30	67%	25	56%	35	78%
Municipal Lot	53	21	40%	16	30%	13	25%	10	19%	15	28%
Subtotal	134	80	60%	74	55%	59	44%	48	36%	65	49%
ON-STREET											
Main, Franklin-Park (northbound)	10	2	20%	2	20%	9	90%	7	70%	5	50%
Main, Franklin-Price Chopper (southbound)	18	13	72%	14	78%	17	94%	10	56%	14	78%
Subtotal	28	15	54%	16	57%	26	93%	17	61%	19	68%
Total	162	95	59%	90	56%	85	52%	65	40%	84	52%

Parking demand was high for all observed time periods on a summer afternoon. Observed conditions stayed generally above 75 percent of capacity overall, with the exception of the Park Street section of the Price Chopper lot, in which usage peaked at 75 percent of capacity. Demand was greatest in the Main Street section of the Price Chopper lot and the Northbound on-street parking located on Main Street. Both areas each averaged at least 90 percent filled, and also exhibited parking conditions greater than capacity during at least one observed time period due to instances of illegal parking and parking in unmarked areas. Parking demand for the entire area peaked between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm.

Though demand in some lots was very high, other nearby lots were not utilized to capacity. The W. Park Street section of the Price Chopper lot averaged only 64 percent filled, while the Main Street section of the same lot exceeded capacity in more than half of the observed time periods. The municipal lot adjacent to the police station also was never filled to capacity, while the on-street spaces on Main Street, all within 400 feet of the municipal lot, exhibited very high demands.

In comparison to parking conditions observed during the afternoon, parking demand during evening hours was well within overall capacity. Evening occupancy peaked between 5:00 and 5:30, and continued decreasing until the end of the study at 7:00. Demand for the Main Street section of the Price Chopper lot remained high, exceeding capacity in the 5:00-5:30 period. A portion of this occupancy can likely be attributed to the occurrence of a wake at Kelly Funeral Home, as it was observed that several people attending the wake chose to park in the Price Chopper lot after the Kelly lot exceeded its capacity. Occupancy rates in all other lots either decreased, or remained the same as the observed average afternoon occupancies. Occupancy in the municipal lot was especially low, peaking at only 40 percent of capacity in the 5:00 to 5:30 period. Usage of on-street spaces, both North and southbound, peaked at 90 and 94 percent, respectively, likely indicating that these spaces were heavily relied upon for diners of the corridor's several restaurants, as most other businesses closed between 5:00 and 6:00. The Park Street section of the Price Chopper lot was also underutilized during the evening, averaging only 44 percent full.

The availability of parking is a function not only of supply and occupancy, but also of how frequently parking spaces are vacated. In order to provide a picture of turnover rates in this study, the digits of license plates were recorded during each parking count, thus providing not only a count of the number of cars located in each area, but data on the length of time that each vehicle was present. By examining the retention rates in each lot, it is possible to determine the turnover rates in each lot. Turnover rates for this study were calculated by totaling the number of unique vehicles observed in two given time periods, and dividing this number by the average number of vehicles observed at one time. This method results in a maximum turnover rate of 2.0. Turnover rates were calculated based on the collected afternoon data, since afternoon was the busier of the two study times. Turnover data is represented in Table 6.

TABLE 6. TURNOVER RATES

	Cars parked at 11:00 AM	Cars parked at 2:00 pm	Number of cars retained	Turnover Rate
Price Chopper- Park Street Section	24	17	10	1.66
Price Chopper- Main Street Section	41	48	18	1.60
Private lot total	65	65	28	1.57
Main St. On-Street, even side	10	13	0	2.0
Main St. On-Street, odd side	8	6	0	2.0
Municipal Lot	44	35	22	1.44
Public lot total	62	54	22	1.81
Downtown Area Total	127	119	50	1.59

The turnover rate was lowest in the municipal parking lot adjacent to the town hall. This may indicate that this lot contains a high number of town hall employees, and few patrons of businesses and restaurants utilizing the lot. If the town takes any future measures to encourage parking in this lot, it may be beneficial to town hall workers, as well as employees of surrounding businesses, to either designate some spaces as reserved during business hours, or to implement a permit parking system for a portion of the lot. The police department, church and chamber of commerce already have designated spaces for employees and visitors.

The turnover rates in the surveyed on-street facilities were the highest possible, indicating that no cars present during the 11:00 survey remained present at 2:00. Since there is relatively little signage along Main Street indicating maximum parking duration, this data suggests that there is a naturally high turnover of vehicles during business hours. An abundance of on-street parking is beneficial to downtown businesses. For those establishments which have relatively short visits by customers, such as dry cleaners and coffee shops, vacant on-street parking can increase the potential number of customers. If the duration and turnover of parking along Main Street is perceived to be a problem, signage indicating maximum parking durations could be installed, thus contributing to an increase in turnover. There are currently very few on-street spaces with noted restrictions.

Although circulation problems were not observed to be a concern during the period of the study, signage may also prevent future circulation problems from occurring by pointing out the most direct routes to alternate parking locations. This will likely become increasingly important if the downtown experiences additional commercial growth. The potential for increased signage is one that could potentially be addressed in the upcoming Downtown Lee Circulation Study. Lee's decision to prohibit parking areas within the frontyard setback in the Downtown Commercial

Business Corridor area, which includes the length of Main Street from Housatonic to Center Streets, has had the benefit of creating a walkable downtown corridor, but has also had the unintended effect of making parking facilities appear to be in short supply during peak periods.

Forty-seven percent of parking spaces located in the larger downtown area, and half of those located within the south downtown focus area are held in private ownership. In addition, there are several well-maintained, easily accessible private lots located within convenient distance of the downtown area. These could be useful in the case of future need, or during times of peak activity such as Founder's Day or holiday shopping periods. Cooperative agreements might be worked out with private lot owners to share or make available a portion of their lots to the public in mutually beneficial support of downtown economic revitalization.

Contributing Factors (to be completed)

Local Regulations

Land & Space limitations

Recommendations (to be completed)