

## **PARKING ADVISORY PANEL MEETING**

The PARKING ADVISORY PANEL (PAP) met on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, at 3:30 p.m. as a virtual Zoom meeting.

The meeting was opened by the Acting Chair, Kirby Hutto. The following members were present: Danny Yoder, Joan Fenton, Jake Mooney, Janelle Bouie, and Mike Rodi. City staff in attendance were Chris Engel, Rick Siebert and Jason Ness.

The minutes for the January and February meetings were unanimously approved with the correction of one typographical error.

The first item on the agenda was the status of the new garage. Engel provided a brief update with the schedule of Council review of the CIP. Engel was asked to walk through a briefing he had provided a few days prior to the DBAC. He indicated this briefing was planned to be provided to Council in a 2,2, 1 format in the next few days. Michael Cusano joined the meeting during the briefing. After resolving a technical issue, Engel screen shared the slide deck.

The briefing began with a discussion of parking utilization from the 2015 Nelson Nygaard parking study. Engel indicated that more current pre-covid parking demand data backed up the study data. The data indicated parking demand peaks during mid-day, Monday through Friday. During those peaks the Market St Garage frequently approaches capacity. A later slide showed the actual closings for 2019. Market St closed to transient traffic for an average of about an hour one to two days a week. Engel noted that at time the garage closed it was not at 100% of capacity. He explained that parking staff closed the garage to hourly parkers when about 25 spaces were left so that monthly parkers could still access the facility.

The briefing continued with a reenumeration of public parking spaces taken out of service over the last 15 to 20 years. 94 spaces have been removed in the last 5 years and not replaced. He also indicated we expect 181 spaces to be removed in the near future based on re-development plans. He further indicated this did not include privately owned parking that due to redevelopment is no longer available for public parking. Hutto pointed out that all these changes have occurred since the city created any new public parking. Mooney suggested that perhaps these spaces were just excess parking since people had still been able to find parking. Fenton suggested that downtown customers may simply be unable to find parking and decided to go to another area of the city or the county.

Engel then provided some data on the current growth of population and business employment. The age of the Market St Garage (built in 1975) was then referenced as a possible redevelopment opportunity.

There followed a very brief summary of the City/County MOA for the retention of the courts system downtown. He then outlined that the agreement provides two options for the County if the city chooses not to build a new parking facility.

This began a free flowing discussion of the advantages and disadvantages a possible new garage. Hutto advocated for the garage based on the pre-covid parking utilization. Siebert then went into a detailed explanation of the operational challenge of allowing transient parkers to use the

Market St Garage if the first 100 parking spaces are reserved for the exclusive use of the County. Rodi suggested both the city and the county would not want the negative publicity associated with people having to drive past empty spaces to park higher in the garage. Mooney expressed skepticism that this was in fact a real operational issue and suggested that it could be easily be worked around. He noted that reserved spaces in garages was common. Siebert indicated that is true but reserved areas are typically above open parking areas in a public garage. He said the issue here is the County is requiring their spaces be on the ground floor. Hutto suggested the greater issue is an actual lack of capacity if 100 spaces are taken out of service for the county. Again, Money was skeptical that parking demand will return to pre-covid levels or people would not just find other parking. Bouie returned to the growth of population and employment. He suggested the solution had to be in better parking management rather than any increase in actual parking.

The conversation then moved into questions of residential development and urban design and the greater questions of transportation demand management. Rodi brought the question back to the immediate issue of the deadline in the MOA. Mooney suggested the garage project just seemed a waste of resources instead of a comparatively simple parking management solution for the garage.

There ensued a round table discussion of parking demand and parking supply. Bouie suggested that increased population and business activity over the last twenty years and decreasing parking supply might suggest there is no correlation between parking supply and business activity. Siebert said that increased demand in the past may have resulted in better utilization of existing supply but that last pre-covid data showing garage closings at peak times might also suggest that the city is now reaching an inflection point between supply and demand.

There was then a discussion about the age of the Market St Garage and its future utility. Siebert indicated an engineering inspection of the garage is already scheduled for next year and it should provide a solid answer. But he also noted the garage is almost 50 years old and all concrete structures, no matter how well maintained, have a finite life span.

Fenton brought up the idea that the meeting had now run over an hour perhaps the panel needs to wrap up. Hutto noted that the parking action plan was the next item on the agenda. This brought up a new discussion of the scope of the Panel and the relationship of parking to transportation policy and land use policy.

At 4:50 PM Rodi acknowledged the issues but made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Fenton and the meeting was adjourned.