



City of Brainerd

Parking Plan

Adopted February 22, 2022

Brainerd Parking Commission
Brainerd City Council

OVERVIEW

The Parking Commission was tasked by the City Council to study and make recommendations regarding parking in the City of Brainerd with specific emphasis on reviewing the City's leased parking. With a focus on the downtown area, the Parking Commission discussed the various issues they see as business owners, patrons, advocates, and residents of the downtown. These discussions included members of city staff (City Administrator, City Engineer, Community Development Director, Police Chief, and Finance Director), members of the City Council, and members of the public through a town hall meeting held in June. The Commission also conducted a parking study of the downtown area. The Commission presented their original recommendations to the City Council in workshop in October 2021, and the City Council formally considered the recommendations in December 2021. Upon consideration, the City Council sent the recommendations back to the Parking Commission to reconsider their numbers and remove the parking meter recommendation. The following recommendations are revised per the City Council's comments and direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Increase the rates for leased lots to a level that adequately funds the Parking Fund and review rates each November to determine whether a rate increase is necessary for the following year. The Commission recommends the following changes to the fee schedule:

Parking Lot	Current Rate	Proposed Rate	Current Anticipated Net Revenue	Anticipated Net Revenue with Proposed Changes
Burlington Northern	\$20.00 & \$25.00	\$40.00	(\$20,641)	(\$7,578)
Maple	\$15.00	\$25.00	\$8,086	\$14,974
Alley	\$35.00	\$40.00	\$2,504	\$4,642
City Hall	\$35.00	\$40.00	\$3,393	\$3,927
Total Net Revenue			(\$6,658)	\$15,965

Justification: The need for an increase in rates is multifaceted. First, the Burlington Northern lot annually operates in a deficit and is ultimately subsidized by the Maple lot, Alley, and City Hall lot. While simply raising the rates for the Burlington lot would address the deficit issue, the Commission believes that the City should also likewise increase the rates for the Maple lot, Alley, and City Hall lot to bring them closer in line with what may be charge by the private sector. Finally, increased rates will ensure that the Parking Lot Fund is fully self-sufficient moving forward.

Parking lot rates were last adjusted in 2019. At that time, the Burlington Northern lot was increased from \$10.00 and \$15.00, and both the Alley and the City Hall lot were increased from \$25.00. The Maple lot was the one lot whose rate was decreased from \$20.00. The reasoning for the decrease at that time was because the average occupancy of the lot was less than 45% and the decreased was aimed at getting more people to park there. However, since September of 2019,

the lot has maintained full occupancy most of the year as students have been parking in the lot due to the Brainerd High School construction project. Even though most of these students give up their spots in the summer months (June through August), the lot has continued to maintain an occupancy greater than 60% during those months. Additionally, roughly half of the commercial spaces downtown were vacant and approximately 25 rental units have been added downtown since 2019. With the increased activity downtown as well as the greater awareness of the Maple lot due to the high school project, staff believes that the Maple lot will continue to have a high occupancy rate into the future even after the high school project is completed.

Implementation Cost: Staff time

Implementation Timeline: First full quarter upon adoption

Recommendation #2: The Parking Commission recommends the following parking enforcement measures be taken:

- Between Front St. and Maple St. and S. 6th St. and S. 8th St, change on-street parking times from 2 hours to 3 hours.
- Adjust the enforcement time period from 8:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday to 7:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday.
- Direct the Police Department to conduct strict and consistent enforcement during the enforcement period.
- Eliminate the business validation policy.
- Update all signage to reflect the time changes and install additional signage to ensure clear communication of parking restrictions.

Justification: One of the primary issues with downtown parking that the Commission reviewed is the balance of allowing enough time for on-street parking on the core downtown streets for business patrons to shop, eat, and enjoy all that downtown has to offer while keeping commercial and residential tenants from monopolizing the prime parking areas. Additionally, the necessary increase in leased lot rates may result in existing lessors choosing to end their leases and take their chances with on-street parking. Therefore, a critical component to any improvements in downtown parking is enforcement.

Increasing on-street parking from 2 hours to 3 hours should allow sufficient time for most patrons to enjoy the downtown but will likely result in further abuse by residential and commercial tenants. Therefore, strict and consistent enforcement by the Police Department is necessary. To further avoid abuse, the Commission recommends that the Police Department provide no grace period in their enforcement and eliminate the business validation policy, which has been abused by businesses validating each other's parking violations in previous years. Finally, all signage in the downtown will need to be changed to reflect the time changes, and additional signage should be added to increase user awareness as there are currently only a couple of parking restriction signs per block.

The Parking Commission recognizes that strict enforcement may come at a cost of the downtown's social capital as a parking ticket received by a first-time visitor to the downtown (or any visitor no matter how often they visit the downtown) could result in that visitor gaining a negative perception of the downtown, which they could then shared with others. Additionally, strict enforcement will require more of the Police Department's attention, which could be spent in other areas.

To that end, the Parking Commission maintains that parking meters are the right solution for the downtown. They require minimal enforcement effort as a police officer or CSO needs to merely check the meter where a car is parked to ensure that it has money in it, they allow patrons and tenants to park as long as they wish during the enforcement period as long as they are willing to pay for it, and the net revenue earned through parking meters could be used to further downtown improvements and programming.

Implementation Cost: Police Department staff time and cost of making and installing new signage.

Implementation Timeline: Critical to the management of parking and overall implementation of this plan.

Recommendation #3: Designate 90% of the net revenue generated by leased parking spaces for downtown programs and improvements and transfer these funds to the EDA for implementation.

Justification: Allocating 90% of the net revenue generated by leased parking spaces for downtown programs and improvements would have many benefits. Primarily, it would allow for continued economic vitality in the downtown through grants, beautification, marketing, etc. without costing Brainerd taxpayers a dime. In fact, use of these funds in the downtown may actually result in increased downtown property values, which only takes some of the burden off the residential tax base.

The intent of keeping 10% of net revenue in the Parking Fund would be to ensure that the fund maintains a sufficient balance to cover any unanticipated costs that the fund may incur (e.g. snow falls greater than anticipated, damage to lots and meters, reconstruction bid prices than come in higher than anticipated, etc.).

Implementation Cost: Staff time

Implementation Timeline: Immediately upon implementation of new leased parking rates.

Recommendation #4: Update downtown kiosks in a manner that matches the aesthetics of the downtown, and implement wayfinding in and around the downtown area to guide visitors and

residents alike to the various amenities in and around the downtown, with elements including but not limited to:

- Location of parking
- Distances to public areas (e.g. City Hall, Library, Gregory Park, County Courthouse, 7th & Laurel, High School, etc.)
- Maps of downtown businesses and services
- Community information (i.e. event notices, street closures, etc.)

Justification: A reoccurring topic that was continually brought up during the Commission's discussions was the need for wayfinding and a general improvement in communication downtown. Wayfinding will provide pedestrians and motorists alike on-street directions to various destinations while updated kiosks in and around the downtown can be used to provide more specific information such as locations of individual businesses and services and announcements such as events and street closures. Updated kiosks will also ensure the information is regularly kept up to date and are, in general, much more appealing than the current pinboard kiosks.

Implementation Cost: The Commission recommends using Parking Fund revenue designated to the EDA to fund these improvements. Depending on the size, quality, and design of kiosks, prices vary between \$500 and \$5,000 per kiosk. The cost of wayfinding would be the cost of the signs, road paint, etc. used and whether the project planning is contracted out or done in house.

Implementation Timeline: As determined by the EDA as revenue becomes available.

Recommendation #5: Update the City's ordinances to require property owners in and around the downtown to identify off-street areas where their tenants (commercial and residential) will park.

Justification: Currently, property owners in the downtown area are exempt from providing any off-street parking for their commercial and residential tenants. This was not an issue 5 years ago when the downtown was 50% empty but is becoming and will continue to become an issue as the downtown continues to fill back in. In just the last 3 years alone, over a dozen commercial spaces and over 3 dozen apartment units have been filled that were previously empty or non-existent. In any residential zone, property owners would be required to provide 1 ¼ off-street parking spaces per unit. This recommendation acknowledges that downtown property owners, generally, do not have the ability to add off-street parking but do have a responsibility to account for any additional burden to parking that may result from additional development/redevelopment.

Implementation Cost: Staff time

Implementation Timeline: Direct the Planning Commission to draft and recommend ordinance language to the City Council no later than May 31, 2022.

Recommendation #6: Charge the EDA with the task of developing a marketing strategy and list the Front St. lot, Laurel St. lot, and City Hall lot for redevelopment.

Justification: If the above recommendations are implemented, the Commission believes that the opportunity cost of maintaining the parcels that contain the Laurel St. lot, Front St. lot, and City Hall lot in their current capacity will become higher than their use as parking lots. For example, a building with an estimated market value of \$1,000,000 would have a tax capacity (based on the city's total 2021 tax capacity) of \$19,250. Such a project alone could result in either a 0.173% reduction in the City's levy (based on the 2021 tax levy) or \$14,116 in additional tax revenue should the 2021 tax rate of 73.430% stay the same. This also does not take into account the economic benefits such a project would reap the construction and maintenance of such a building and the businesses and residential units the building could house. Finally, as the Eight05 Laurel project showed, a new building on the site of a current parking lot would not necessarily create a burden on parking as the building could be designed to include its own off-street parking.

Implementation Cost: Staff time plus costs of marketing/development firm if such services are acquired

Implementation Timeline: Immediately, but with patience

Recommendation #7: Continue to take steps to make areas in and around downtown a much more pedestrian friendly place. Such improvements could include but are not limited to:

- Alley lighting and aesthetic improvements
- Additional benches
- Picnic tables
- Bike racks
- Designated bike lanes
- Green spaces

Justification: As the downtown area continues to thrive through positive redevelopment, an emphasis must continue to be made on making downtown not just a commercial space that is auto oriented and where people do business and leave but a community space where people live. Simple improvements like those listed above will help to continue to turn the page from an auto oriented concrete jungle to a pedestrian friendly community space.

Implementation Cost: The Commission recommends using Parking Fund revenue designated to the EDA to fund experience improvements (e.g. bike racks, picnic benches, etc.) and capital funds for infrastructure improvements (e.g. lighting, bike lanes, green spaces, etc.).

Implementation Timeline: As determined by the EDA for experience improvements and by the City Council for infrastructure improvements.) as revenue becomes available

Recommendation #8: Implement a targeted informational and educational campaign to inform and educate the property owners, business owners, residential tenants, and patrons in and around the downtown area of recommendations implemented by the City Council and why such recommendations are being implemented.

Justification: Implementation of any of the recommendations made in this plan will have a certain level of impact on the downtown, some more significant than others. To ensure smooth implementation, all users of the downtown should be regularly kept up to date on any immediate or future changes to the current landscape of the downtown.

Implementation Cost: Staff time

Implementation Timeline: Continually

CLOSING

The Parking Commission acknowledges that these 8 recommendations are not be-all-end-all solutions, but they are a good start to a new direction. If adopted by the City Council, the Commission believes that it has achieved the goal that it was given by the Council.

Per the City Council's policy on Ad Hoc committees, the next step would be for the Commission to either be disbanded until a time arises for a new parking commission to be formed to address issues not yet identified or to be given a new task. As such, the Parking Commission requests that the City Council reconstitute the Parking Commission from an Ad Hoc committee to a standing committee.

The reasoning behind this request is that, if adopted, these recommendations should be regularly evaluated and modified as necessary. Reestablishing an Ad Hoc parking commission each year to evaluate the effectiveness of these recommendations and other parking issues would be time consuming and likely ineffective as a new commission members would have to be sought out and onboarded each year. Additionally, having a standing Parking Commission would allow for the City Council to send any parking related issues to the Parking Commission for research and analysis any time such issues arise.

Therefore, the Parking Commission requests that the City Council reconstitute the Commission as a standing committee to meet at least bi-annually with the initial committee being made up of the current 5 members the Parking Commission to ensure continuity.