

Comprehensive Parking Program

The downtown area of the Town of Reading is an historic business area with commercial and retail activity typical of small New England downtowns. Parking has frequently been a complaint of both businesses as well as residents seeking to shop in downtown. While the town has grown and prospered, little new development has occurred in the downtown in decades. To stimulate development, the Town obtained a \$6 million Downtown Improvement Project grant to improve streets and sidewalks. It is also considering the adoption of a new “Smart Growth” zoning district in the downtown that would lead to an increase in the intensity of land uses. Both efforts immediately triggered heightened fear of an increase in the demand for parking spaces.

Nelson\Nygaard was retained to produce a “comprehensive parking program” to help the Town evaluate parking operations in downtown and consider if and how a parking garage could be constructed. Much good work had been done by an ad hoc committee, which created a parking inventory and had surveyed business owners. Nelson\Nygaard supplemented this with broad surveys of parking users as well as a detailed parking utilization study across all hours of the day. The feasibility and cost of a parking garage sited on a municipal lot also was evaluated.

The analysis demonstrated that contrary to popular belief, there was plenty of parking supply in the downtown to support all existing uses as well as the entire amount of future growth under the maximum Smart Growth development scenario; rather than a parking supply problem, Reading had a supply management problem. Nelson\Nygaard recommended a phased implementation strategy to unlock underutilized public and private assets in and near the downtown through simple adjustments to existing permit programs, time-limits, and signing. Zoning incentives to share parking were developed and new practices to maximize perceived availability were recommended, including extended enforcement hours and reverse angle parking.



Project Duration: 2008-2009

Total Budget: \$50,000

Nelson\Nygaard Budget: \$28,000

For more information:

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