



Downtown Dover

Parking Study

Prepared for:

City of Dover
Dover / Kent County MPO
Downtown Dover Partnership

Prepared by:

Langan Engineering & Environmental Services, Inc.
KSK Architects Planners Historians

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Executive Summary

The Downtown Dover Parking Study is an initiative of the City of Dover and the Dover / Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization (DKCMPO), in partnership with the Downtown Dover Partnership (DDP). These partners retained our consulting team, led by Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc. (Langan) and with KSK Architects Planners and Historians, Inc. (KSK), to take a fresh look at the issue of parking downtown, and to come up with a series of recommendations that would be updated from the last time a parking study was conducted (in 2004) and would reinforce attempts to redevelop and bring fresh vitality downtown.

The primary study area for this new study was bound by Water Street to the south, West Street to the west, Fulton Street to the north and State Street to the east. Additionally we also studied the area around the City Hall Lot which is bound by State Street to the west, Division Street to the north, Water Street to the south and Park Drive to the east.

As with most successful downtowns, the complaints about parking in Dover are chronic. It was important to investigate the root cause of the complaints – whether they were caused by lack of sufficient parking (supply problem), by increased usage (demand problem), by lack of wayfinding or fear of safety (human factor problems), by parking rates (pricing problem), by unbalanced demand issues (management problem), or by a combination thereof.

This analysis was especially important in light of the longstanding public discussion in Dover that a parking garage would be the solution. If this were the first option taken to address the parking issues, it would likely burden the city with significant debt to fund construction, while it would likely not operate significantly dissimilar from some of the existing parking lots which are currently half-full.

The project team reviewed the previous study and other available parking data, conducted additional parking counts for both on-street and off-street parking, reviewed the current parking rate structure and peer cities' rate structures, conducted significant stakeholder and public outreach, and at the end of the analysis came up with a set of recommendations.

Ultimately, the data and the feedback showed that during peak-demand periods there is actually plenty of unused capacity within the current supply of downtown parking spaces. However, the patterns of parking utilization show that all available resources are actually not well utilized. "Parking surfers"¹ and staff occupy the prime parking spots that should instead be dedicated to visitors and customers for downtown businesses, and the current parking rate structure provides incentives for these users and for parking permit holders, in detriment of the desired visitors and customers.

Key Findings

- There are approximately 1,762 parking spaces within the study area, including 607 On-Street public spaces, 459 Off-Street public parking spaces, and an estimated 696 Off-Street private parking spaces.
- To date, the City of Dover has managed parking demand with traditional methods, including, reserved parking leases (as an incentive to attract businesses downtown), free short-term parking, time limits for some spots, and installation of some metered spots.
- Downtown Dover time limits are having no effect at distributing demand to areas with more availability and providing more rotation for customers for downtown businesses. Instead, "parking

¹ Parking surfers are local workers who avoid the 2-Hour parking limits by constantly coming back to their cars to move them to a nearby spot or to re-feed a meter, thus effectively blocking the goal of the limits, which is to increase the rotation and availability of parking spots near businesses.

surfers” are placing many of these spaces out of the inventory of available parking for customers. The current meter rates are also ineffective at moving these undesired uses away from high-demand areas.

- The existing parking lease program is valuable to some key businesses that were attracted downtown. However, the current configuration of permit spaces effectively creates an inner ring of parking that is available only to permit holders (and might thus sit idle), while desired customers and visitors have to seek out other options further away.
- The overall peak occupancy of on-street parking did not exceed 75%; and of the off-street parking lots did not exceed 63%. When adjusted for time of day and type of use, the overall system occupancy never exceeded 60%, when the typical targets for efficient use without overcrowding are typically are 85% occupancy for on-street parking and 90% for off-street parking.
- There are indications that downtown Dover can become a successful park-once destination, where most drivers only use one parking space per visit, regardless of how many destinations they visit.

The issue is really two-fold: an inefficient distribution of parking capacity, where some lots and preferred on-street spots might see over 80% occupancy, and others linger below 40%; and confusing wayfinding and parking rate systems, which contribute to create a large disincentive for parking downtown.

The project team developed a series of recommendations to address these findings, based on the analysis as well as the input and feedback from multiple stakeholders and the public. These set of recommendations basically fall into these categories:

- Better wayfinding and signage
- Revised parking rate structure
- Improved physical infrastructure, including streetscape, landscape, lighting, security cameras, new pocket parks and connecting walkways, and new gateways to downtown
- Enhanced public engagement and marketing of Historic Downtown Dover as a destination

The proposed wayfinding and signage system can be implemented in phases, and will mitigate the confusion about where to park; will better orient drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians; and will ultimately also help brand Historic Downtown Dover as a cool destination to be, live, work, and play.

The overall pricing rate strategy we recommend provides for a pricing- and demand-based strategy for managing parking in downtown Dover. It provides for a streamlined set of parking rates for visitors to downtown (\$2 for on-street and still 25 cents for off-street lots); while providing a restructured set of fees for permit parking that starts to fully value the location of each spot provided. Using these strategies, parking demand will be better distributed, and the right users will park at the right spots at the right costs.

The revised physical infrastructure will increase safety, change perceptions, and create an overall attractive environment downtown. New pedestrian connections and new gateways are proposed to break down barriers and bring more visitors and customers downtown. Finally, the enhanced public engagement and marketing will reinforce and perpetuate the success of all other improvements.