

Report on Parking in East Arlington Commercial District

8/11/10

In February, 2010, the Board of Selectmen received the East Arlington Parking Study (East Arlington Parking Analysis, Walker Parking Consultants, July 1, 2009 aka. Walker Parking Study), conducted under the Commercial Development Strategy by Koff Associates and funded by the Town. After discussion, the Board referred this study to the TAC for review. The TAC established a Working Group to evaluate the Study and recommend actions. The Working Group was made up of TAC members Ed Starr (Chair), Howard Muise, Officer Corey Rateau, Steve Kurland and Laura Wiener. Five East Arlington business owners attended some or all meetings, including Allen Elgart (office condos at 180 Mass. Ave.), John Dunn (Arlington Optical), Richard Fraiman (Capitol Theatre and Capitol Block), Marc Gurtin (13Forest Gallery), Angelo DiGiralamo (Olivio's), and Kathleen Darcy (Leader Bank).

The recommendations by Walker Associates were

1. Create a separate parking entity to implement and monitor a parking program and allocate any income.
2. Install 10 pay-and-display curbside meters along Mass Ave to preserve spaces for customer use and encourage regular turnover.
3. Institute a parking permit program on residential streets within ½ blocks of Mass Ave to balance employee and resident parking needs.
4. Investigate shared use agreements between businesses and privately held parking lots.
5. Allow net income from parking to be reinvested in district.
6. Subcontract some functions of parking management and enforcement to a private agency.

The Consultant's study documented that there are 96 legal parking spaces on Mass Ave from Elmhurst to Varnum on the south side and from Harlow to Windsor on the north side. The study also noted that there are 250 off-street privately owned spaces and approximately 600 on-street parking spaces on side streets within walking distance of the commercial district, resulting in about 950 available spaces.

The goal of the Commercial Study, and of these recommendations, is to support the vitality of the East Arlington business district. Parking can be a limiting factor for customers who want to shop, eat, go to the movies, or use the Library in East Arlington. Inadequate parking can lead to congestion from circulating cars and pollution from idling vehicles. But most importantly, it is the perception of the businesses that a lack of accessible parking keeps customers away. The TAC hopes that by working with the businesses to promote small improvements, parking can be removed as a barrier to patronizing East Arlington's businesses.

The Problems

The Consultant's study indicated that during much of the week parking in East Arlington is adequate for the needs of the businesses, but at peak times and peak locations it is not. Peak times were identified as weekends, primarily Friday and Saturday nights, and Saturday afternoons. The Parking study also identified the needs of employees for long term parking as competing with needs of customers for short term, accessible parking. Peak locations are the blocks closest to Lake Street.

For many retail businesses, a significant part of their annual sales occur during the holiday season (November/December). This is the time when parking is in highest demand. It is expected that for some weekday periods demand will exceed availability during these months as well. This was not addressed by the consultant's study and data is not available but should be obtained next November/December.

Thus there are two different parking issues. The first is **weekdays**, where it is desirable to have high turnover of parking spaces close to businesses so customers can easily patronize the commercial establishments. This means that the convenient parking spaces not be filled by employees. Optimum parking management would have a maximum of about 80 – 85 % of parking spaces filled, allowing the next customer to find a place. The second issue is **weekends**, Friday night through Saturday night. Data show that the parking demand for dining and/or movies is greater than what is available.

Employee Parking

It is estimated that the businesses in East Arlington have around 300 employees, but of course all are not present at the same time. In discussion we estimated that the order of 200 might be working during weekdays, and maybe 100 or so during the weekends. Since there are 96 close parking spaces on Mass Ave, the employees could fill all of the available parking spaces.

Walker Associates recommended, and we concur, that employees and business owners should park off of Mass. Ave., leaving Mass. Ave. spaces for customers. If done, this is a workable solution and will provide higher turnover in those spaces.

To raise awareness to these issues, business owners who participated in the working group have created flyers with suggested parking policies for employees and employers. These flyers will be distributed to area businesses to promote self-regulation. The flyers suggest employees consider alternative transportation (walk, bus, bike, carpool), and if they do drive, park on side streets toward the end of the first block away from Mass Ave. Thus the preferred approach at this time to this issue is a soft one—to communicate to the business owners and employees that it is

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in everyone's best interest to allow customers to use the prime spaces. The flyers developed for businesses and for employees are contained in Appendix 1.

The TAC does not support the consultant's recommendation of parking permits shared between residents and employees for on-street parking.

Recommendation 1: *Support the businesses effort to promote self-regulation and to handle this issue as a group, promoting both alternative transportation and parking off of Mass Ave. No action is required by the Board.*

Shared Parking

Shared parking is the use of parking facilities by others when they are not being used for their primary purpose. While some areas are always busy, there are parking lots along Mass. Ave. that are at times underutilized. Walker Associates recommended that the Town encourage the shared use of both public and private lots. The TAC supports this concept and the Working Group has investigated available options. Three offer some promise, and a fourth business has agreed to participate in an informal manner.

Hardy School: As a pilot program, Capitol Theater owner Richard Fraiman has requested the lease of 10 spaces on Friday evenings and Saturdays for a period of 6 months to see if customers will use the spaces, which are about 1/5 of a mile from Mass. Ave. The TAC recommends that the Town enter into a pilot program with the Capitol Theater to encourage parking at the Hardy School for moviegoers and/or employees. If successful, this should be expanded to other businesses, and should be promoted for use during the holiday season.

Recommendation 2: *Allow the Capitol Theater to lease 10 spaces at the Hardy School on Friday evenings and Saturdays for a period of 6 months as a pilot study. Review results in 6 months. (Note: this was approved by the Board on 7/12/10.)*

Trinity Baptist Church: The Working Group has also initiated discussions with the Church, which is at the corner of Mass. Ave. and Amsden Street. The church deferred discussion until their administration conducts a review. We may hear in the fall that they are interested in leasing some parking spaces and under what terms.

Crosby School: The current parking at Crosby school is in the back of the school near the playground with access only from Oxford Street. Oxford Street is one-way towards Mass Ave and isn't easily accessed. This is inconvenient for customers but could be used by employees. Modifications could be made to the Crosby School grounds to create a strip of parking at the southerly edge of the Crosby School property, closest to Mass. Ave. This would allow easy access from Winter Street and be much closer to Mass Ave.

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Recommendation 3: *Allow shared parking at the Crosby lot during the weekends and evenings for employees. Consider changes to Crosby School to create additional parking accessible from Winter Street in the future. Board action is required.*

Valet parking, suggested by the Consultant, was discussed and the business representatives did not consider it economically viable at this time.

Timed Parking on Mass Ave

The Traffic Rules and Order indicate that all of Mass. Ave. is two hour parking unless otherwise posted. The time limitations are currently from 8 AM to 6 PM, Sundays excluded. Two hours is a reasonable time for most shopping and dining.

In the Capitol Square area, there are several parking sites with shorter time periods to accommodate businesses where customers are in and out relatively quickly. Several locations with shorter parking limits are located on Mass. Ave. in the area:

- 15-minute zone on the south side in front of the Post Office and dry cleaners just east of Orvis Road
- 15-minutes zone on the south side in front of Dagg's Deli just west of Melrose Street
- 30-minute zone on the north side in front of Giles Fine Wines
- 15-minute zone on the north side in front of Maida Pharmacy.

The TAC recommends eliminating one 15-minute space on the south side of Mass. Ave. immediately west of the crosswalk at Marathon Street. Two existing 15-minute spaces will remain east of the crosswalk, in front of Dagg's Deli. The TAC reviewed the need for additional short timed spaces in the area, and found the current distribution adequate.

Recommendation 4: *Change one 15-minute timed space on the south side immediately west of the crosswalk at Marathon Street to 2 hours. Board action is required.*

The current signage on Mass. Ave. indicates two hour parking without stating applicable times – which are 8AM to 6PM except for Sunday. When new signs are installed under the Mass. Ave. Corridor Project, this information should be included on the signs.

In the review, it was noted that there are currently two parking spaces reserved for taxicabs on the westbound side of Mass. Ave. between Winter and Oxford Streets. Local businesses have observed that these spaces are rarely used for taxis, and are located in an area with a high demand for parking. The TAC recommends removing the designation of these spaces for taxi parking, and converting them to standard

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two hour vehicle parking, thus increasing the available prime parking spots from 96 to 98.

Recommendation 5: *Convert the two taxi stand spaces between Winter and Oxford to two hour spaces. Board action is required.*

Marking of Parking Spaces in a Business District

The marking of parking spaces in high use districts can lead to more orderly parking. When spaces are defined, parkers will not usually park in the middle of a space. For example, with undefined spaces a vehicle might park in the middle where there is room for two, or park so that there are only two vehicles in a space for three. Without lines delineating spaces, parking can be less efficient and less controlled.

We propose a trial marking of spaces on Mass. Ave. in Capitol Square (between Orvis Road and Egerton Road on the south side, and between Oxford Street and Cleveland Street on the north side) to observe if marked spaces result in more efficient and orderly parking. This will also help reduce illegal and unsafe parking by defining no parking areas near corners, driveways and fire hydrants.

Recommendation 6: *Mark the two blocks between Orvis and Egerton Roads on the south side and between Oxford and Winter Streets on the north side on a trial basis. If deemed successful, when the Mass Ave. Corridor project goes forward, this practice can be extended throughout the entire business district (Orvis Rd. to Milton Street on the south side and Oxford Street to Marathon Street on the north side). Board action is required.*

Parking Enforcement

The goal of parking enforcement is to improve safety (restrict parking close to corners to maintain visibility, in front of fire hydrants, etc) and to manage parking turnover. Without enforcement, the two hour limits are ignored and parking turnover is very low.

There are currently 2.3 full time equivalent (FTE) Parking Control Officers (PCO) in 2010 and in the FY11 budget. This staff is deployed for all of Arlington, not just the East. There are three routes established – East (Mass from Pleasant to Cambridge line and municipal lot), West (Mass Ave to Lexington line, railroad lot, Water St lot, Academy St), and Middle (Mass Ave Robbins/Appleton, Thorndike area, Acton, Herbert, Lake, Broadway). Timed-parking requires two passes of a PCO – one to mark tires, and the next to observe if the auto is still there 2 plus hours later.

The revenue from parking violations in the last few years has averaged about \$400,000 per year from around 14,000 tickets, or about \$28/ ticket. The PCO's are

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responsible for about 6500 of the tickets per year or about \$182,000 (many of the remaining tickets are from overnight parking violations). The salary budgeted for the 2.3 FTEs is \$85,000; with 30% overhead for benefits, this totals about \$110,000 per year. Therefore, the Town can afford to have more enforcement.¹ The goal is to provide better parking management, not increased revenue for the town.

Presently parking enforcement on Mass. Ave. occurs on weekdays between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm, and none on Saturday. It is recommended that current staff randomly cover the full period including Saturdays. It would also be reasonable to increase the PCO level to 4 FTEs incrementally over the next year or two so that Saturdays and late afternoons are covered consistently, and to provide for coverage during individual vacation times.

Recommendation 7: *Increase the level of enforcement to four PCOs over a period of two or three years, observing the parking turnover in the meanwhile, and extend enforcement time to include the full day and Saturdays. Board action is required.*

Walker Associates has recommended modern meters in the Capitol Square area. Modern meters take credit cards and a single meter services 8 to 10 parking spaces. Meters are also more efficient for enforcement since one pass of the PCO is needed rather than two. Meters would facilitate enforcement and increase parking revenue, but would incur capital and maintenance expenses.

The goal of enforcement is to achieve an adequate level of parking turnover for the businesses. The TAC recommends implementing an increase of enforcement staff as recommended above to see if this achieves adequate turnover. Data should be taken when the added enforcement is in place. If adequate turnover is not achieved, then, metering might be considered in the future.

Summary

The recommendations by the consultant would represent a major move towards aggressive parking management, and the TAC recommends that more modest solutions be tried before such a move. Therefore, we do not recommend creating a separate parking entity, installing pay-and display curbside meters, a parking permit program, and subcontracting parking management at this time. These may be required in the future, but other means should be evaluated first, as noted in the recommendations identified for each parking issue.

¹ The PCOs are in the Police budget, but parking revenues go into the general fund. This will require an adjustment of budget for the Police Department so it is not penalized for providing these services that also generate income for the Town.

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Appendix

Sample Brochures for Business Owners and Employees

EAST ARLINGTON BUSINESS DISTRICT

RECOMMENDED OWNER AND EMPLOYEE PARKING PRACTICES

“WHERE TO PARK”

Employees compete with customers and visitors for limited parking spaces on Massachusetts Avenue. If convenient parking is not available, customers and visitors may take their business elsewhere. The East Arlington Business District is issuing the following recommendations to improve access to businesses and services on Mass. Ave. and provide a satisfactory experience for customers, visitors, and employees.

GUIDELINES FOR MASS. AVE. PARKING

- **Mass. Ave. employees and business owners should not park on Mass. Ave.**
- **Employees and owners should be encouraged to walk, bike, take the bus or carpool whenever possible, thereby leaving precious parking spaces for customers.**
- **Employers should direct employees who must drive to park on side streets in the second half of the block, as far away from Mass. Ave. as possible.**

GUIDELINES FOR SIDE STREET PARKING

- **Employers should promote parking practices that ensure a constant turnover of the most convenient spaces on side streets.**
- **Spaces closest to Mass. Ave. should be left for high turnover, short-term parking, whether customers, visitors, or employees.**
- **SHORT TERM EMPLOYEE PARKERS—For quick access to businesses, park within the first block closest to Mass. Ave. for short intervals.**
- **ALL DAY EMPLOYEE PARKERS—For those who expect to be at their work place all or most of the day and don't have difficulty walking, park in the second half of the block, farther away from Mass. Ave.**
- **We urge employees to observe traffic and parking rules, because**
 - **Our neighbors need access to their driveways and the ability to properly maneuver on the streets.**
 - **It helps build the reputation of the business community as a good citizen.**
 - **Enforcement may be increased in the future. It saves money and stress to park lawfully and avoid getting a ticket.**
 - **If someone parks in a timed spot for an extended time, we lose potential customers who could have parked there.**

By self-regulating our employees, the Mass. Ave. area businesses will maximize the community's parking resources and meet everyone's goals. If we are successful, we will have more customers, and a more lively commercial area. Failure to meet the needs of the community may result in the need for stronger, more costly regulatory systems, such as metering or increased ticketing. We thank you for your cooperation.

Employee Parking **Where and Why**

We urge employees to park on side streets as far away from Massachusetts Ave. as possible, because:

- **It allows our customers to park near our businesses. Everyone wants more customers and the easier it is to park, the easier it is for them to come to our businesses**
- **We want to be good neighbors to residents and other businesses. We are all dependent on good will to run our businesses. Our neighbors, both residents and business people, are our clients and our publicists. They can choose to use our products and can speak about us as they wish. A little support to them and from them will generate a great deal of good will.**

We urge employees to use alternate forms of transportation as often as possible, because:

- **The fewer vehicles we have to park, the more spaces we leave for others. A bicycle takes up less space than a car and is easier to park.**
- **Using alternate transportation is good for the environment.**
- **Walking or riding a bike is good for your health and can be very enjoyable and relaxing**

We urge employees to observe traffic and parking rules, because:

- **It is, of course, money-saving and stress-saving to avoid getting a ticket.**
- **Our neighbors need access to their driveways and the ability to properly maneuver on the streets.**
- **If someone parks in a timed (e.g. 30-minute or two-hour) spot for an extended time, we lose potential customers who could have parked there.**

Where to park:

- **Spaces closest to Mass. Ave. should be left for high turnover, short-term parking, whether customers or employees.**
- **SHORT TERM EMPLOYEE PARKERS—For quick access to businesses, park within the first block closest to Mass. Ave. for short intervals.**
- **ALL DAY EMPLOYEE PARKERS—For those who expect to be at their work place all or most of the day and don't have difficulty walking, park in the second half of the block, farther away from Mass. Ave.**

Thanks to everyone who works in Arlington for their help with respect to parking.

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