Rethinking the Parking Requirements as it Relates to Downtown Development

Department of Planning, Conservation and Development

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Summary

The first part of this report mimics the methodology used in a 2005 UCONN study that analyzed the parking ratios in urban mixed-use downtowns and conventional commercial developments in New England. The study concluded that these downtowns generally had much less parking per square foot than conventional control sites. However modern zoning regulations require an equal amount of parking for downtowns as for conventional commercial development.

When applied to Middletown, a similar conclusion can be drawn. The amount of parking provided is significantly less than what is required by the Zoning Code. The Zoning Code requires double the amount of parking than currently exists. However even at peak times Middletown only utilizes 70% of the existing paring.

The second part of this report takes the conclusion from the first part, that parking in the downtown is underutilized and therefore there is potential for new mixed use development supported by the surplus parking. Based on this premise, Middletown could develop an upper limit of 840 2-bedroom apartments in the downtown or half-a-million square feet of commercial/office space, or some mixture of the two. The City controls 448 surplus spaces that provide the opportunity for 219 2-bedroom apartments or 134,400 square feet of commercial retail or office.

These two exercises show that parking is being underutilized as it exists today and could be hindrance to future development. The parking requirements for the downtown should be reevaluated to promote the types of development that would be appropriate in a downtown mixed use setting. Efforts should be made to leverage the significant surplus of parking in private ownership for new development.

Land Use & Off-Street Parking Requirements Analysis

In 2005, UCONN conducted a parking study called Parking at Mixed-Use Centers in Small Cities. "The goal of this [study] is to better understand parking and parking provisions as they relate to smaller cities and towns with mixed-use centers. Specifically, UCONN wanted to address how having dense, walkable, mixed-use center affects parking supply and demand, and how mixed-use centers compare to centers designed along more conventional lines. We tested these questions by conducting case study assessment of six sites in New England. Three of the sites were designated study sites because they were dense, walkable, mixed-use centers. They were contrasted with three control sites that were centers with more conventional development patterns."

The study concluded that "[in] general, the three mixed-use study sites provided much less parking per square foot than the conventional control sites. The study sites also furnished a significant amount of on-street parking and relied more on shared municipal parking lots and parking garages. Given these differences, it is surprising to note that the towns with mixed-use centers demanded almost as much parking for new construction as did towns in which the conventional sites are located. On

average, the amount of parking mandated by base regulations in these six towns is about two and a half times more than the peak use."

The following table shows that applying a similar methodology to examine Middletown's existing parking and land-use discovers the following.

	Parking Spaces	Square feet	% of Total Space	% of Total Existing Spaces
Total Downtown Area		4,087,196	100% of dwntwn area	
Total Building Footprint Area		1,144,252	28% of dwntwn area	
Total Off-Street Parking Ftprt Area	5,827	1,176,667	29% of dwntwn area	100% of existing spaces
Total Building Area (includes upper stories)		3,016,662	NA	
Total Off-Street Parking Spaces	5,827	1,176,667	29% of dwntwn area	100% of existing spaces
Required Parking Spaces	10,056	1,528,512	37% of dwntwn area	172% of existing spaces
Peak Parking Usage	4,078	619,856	15% of dwntwn area	70% of existing spaces

The amount of parking provided is significantly less than what is required by the Zoning Code. The Zoning Code requires nearly double the amount of parking than currently required, however even at peak times Middletown only utilizes 70% of the existing parking.

By this analysis, implementing a zoning requirement of a parking space for every 300 sq. ft. of commercial space would require over ten thousand parking spaces in downtown Middletown. This is almost double the existing off-street parking and more than double the actual peak usage of parking in the study are. A surface lot of ten thousand parking spaces would eat up almost 40% of the land in the downtown.

Off-parking street parking requirements should be driven by the market and be flexible to encourage positive development. The current requirements for off-street parking in the zoning code for downtown developments prevents market efficiencies from developing alternatives to building parking facilities that takes up valuable downtown land.

The City recognizes this issue and waivers are allowed to reduce or eliminate downtown parking requirements. There has been a prevalent use of waivers for downtown development in recent years. Examples include the new Rite Aid building, Harding Development building and the Richman Group.

Surplus Parking & Potential Residential and Commercial Development

The first part of this report concludes that the parking in the downtown is underutilized. Therefore, unlocking the potential of existing surplus parking is an opportunity to encourage new mixed use development.

The 2006 parking survey reported 1,712 surplus spaces: 448 public and 1,264 private. The Zoning code requires 2 spaces for a 2-bedroom apartment and roughly 1 space for every 300 square feet of retail or office.

Based on this information, Middletown could develop 840 2-bedroom apartments in the downtown or half-a-million square feet of commercial/office space, or some mixture of the two.

	Surplus Parking Spaces	Possible Housing Units (2-bedroom)	Possible Commercial Space (sq. ft.)
Public	448	219	134,400
Private	1,264	621	376,200
Total	1,712	840	510,600

It should be noted that the potential reported in the table is an upper limit. In reality not all the spaces above could realistically support the creation of 840 housing units or 500,000 square feet of retail. Most of the spaces are is private hands and the owners would need to be willing to allow the use of the spaces either voluntarily or through compensation. In order to utilize these privately held spaces, some creative tools will need to be developed in order to encourage their efficient use. The City however, has 448 surplus spaces that it could provide as the public infrastructure for a downtown development. This is an untapped resource that should be investigated.

Conclusions

These two exercises show that downtown parking is being underutilized, as it exists today. Current regulations are also a hindrance to future development. The parking requirements for the downtown should be reevaluated to promote the types of development that would be appropriate in a downtown mixed use setting.

The City should pursue three paths to bring parking back into a productive balance.

First, the City should reexamine the parking minimums for the downtown. While the zoning code allows flexibility when deemed appropriate by the Planning and Zoning Commission, this is perhaps viewed as a risk or a deterrent to potential developers. Good design and good development, in areas that the City would encourage it, should be simple and the process should be clear. If the city want mixed use development downtown, it should reflect that in the zoning code.

Second, the City already has a repository of available parking to spur development of its own choosing. It should evaluate the surplus public parking and see what amount could be realistically dedicated for new development. Once the City has this information, it should issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) to see what interest there in utilizing these is spaces for mixed use, residential or commercial development.

Third, the City should investigated the ways it can leverage the surplus spaces held in private ownership, which represent 21% of the total off-street parking spaces in the downtown. This could be done through bonuses when developments involve shared parking or the creation of a parking brokerage, possibly housed in the Downtown Business District.

Fourth, the City should investigate shared use policies/regulation. Current zoning requires parking to be dedicated to the use 24 hours a day, even though the use may only have peak use during a specific block of time. Downtown parking is 90% vacant after 9pm. There are a number of parking lots that could facility development of uses that have different peak use periods. Parking facilities that service primarily restaurants and entertainment venues are lightly used during the day. These sites could support additional office development. Parking facilities that serve primarily offices uses during the day are nearly vacant at night. These facilities could be used to support residential or evening use developments.

Appendix I- Land-use & Off-Street Parking Requirement Count

Block	Area	Building Footprint	%	Off-Street Parking Footprint	%
A	400,017	135,310	34%	117,335	29%
B	146,348	36,955	25%	32,212	22%
C	148,157	48,155	33%	53,024	36%
D	122,692	35,844	29%	48,524	40%
E	143,744	42,119	29%	70,669	49%
F	61,057	20,356	33%	0	0%
H	166,279	46,274	28%	23,211	14%
G	135,461	42,783	32%	14,276	11%
I	209,286	88,741	42%	109,552	52%
J	347,026	27,681	8%	34,843	10%
K	95,853	26,155	27%	10,779	11%
L	303,657	36,311	12%	14,954	5%
M	73,319	20,169	28%	12,315	17%
N	86,991	37,515	43%	15,652	18%
O	116,760	30,488	26%	8,201	7%
P	172,575	91,779	53%	38,413	22%
Q	250,883	105,290	42%	97,331	39%
R	193,733	47,148	24%	70,164	36%
S	159,515	81,256	51%	136,165	85%
T	170,113	42,633	25%	107,339	63%
U	85,002	14,512	17%	28,908	34%
V	156,187	52,277	33%	63,888	41%
W	101,207	18,863	19%	25,998	26%
Harbor	241,334	15,638	6%	42,914	18%
Total	4,087,196	1,144,252	28%	1,176,667	29%

Block	Total Building Area	Total Parking Area
A	272,574	154,208
B	86,440	32,212
C	77,179	53,024
D	74,985	48,524
E	181,850	70,669
F	42,367	0
G	272,604	175,853
H	36,245	23,211
I	279,450	109,552
J	133,562	34,843
K	136,630	10,779
L	40,000	14,954
M	58,555	12,315
N	91,733	15,652
O	78,482	8,201
P	216,473	38,413
Q	316,888	97,331
R	90,000	141,344
S	100,000	136,165
T	221,702	107,339
U	20,400	28,908
V	149,484	63,888
W	18,863	25,998
Harbor	20,196	42,914
Total	3,016,662	1,446,297

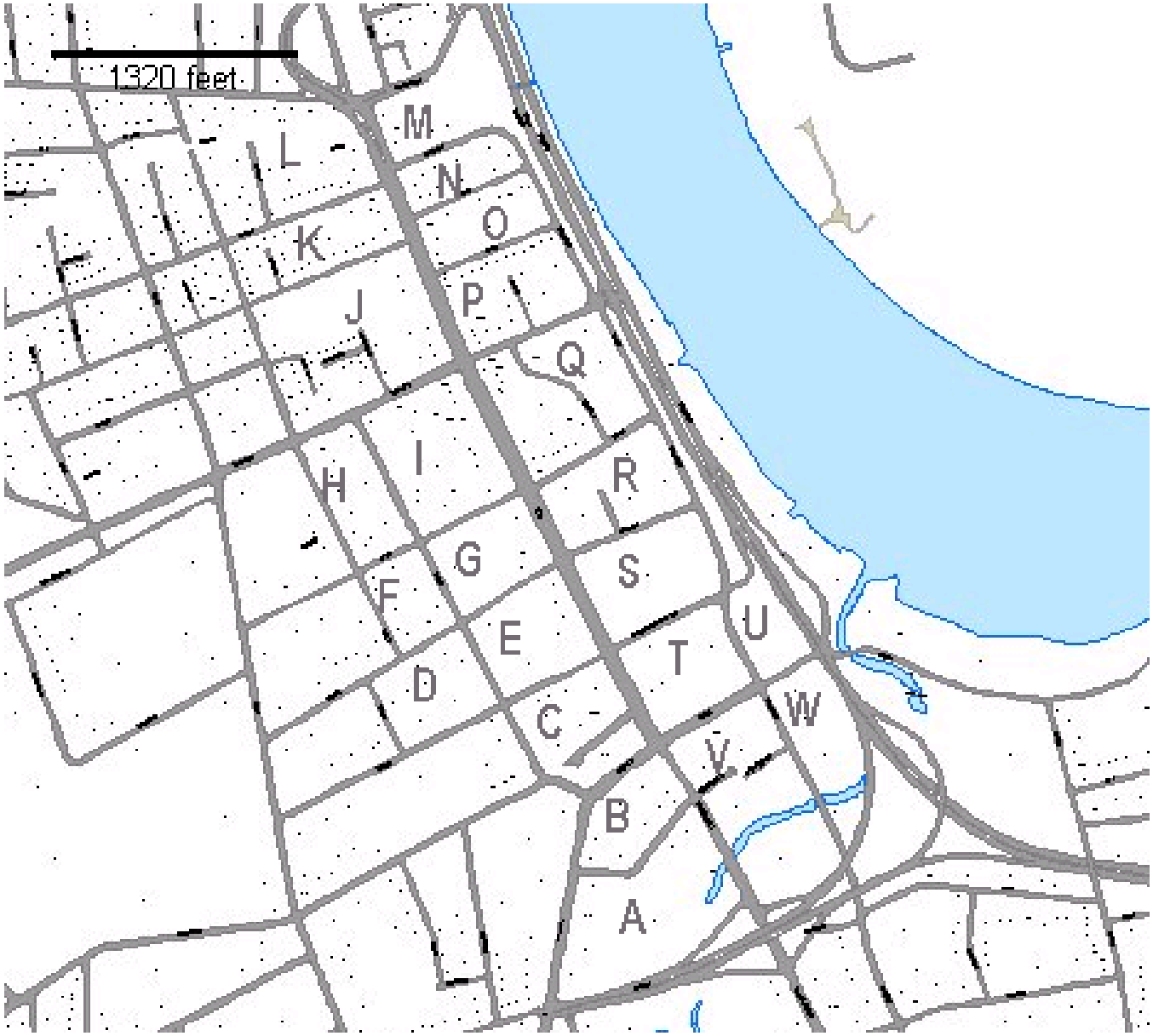
Block	Required Parking by Zoning	Off-Street Parking	Peak Use of Off-Street Parking
A	909	646	628
B	288	140	92
C	257	153	120
D	250	138	42
F	141	0	0
E	606	221	157
G	909	1,142	862
H	121	78	34
I	932	348	203
J	445	161	86
K	455	28	23
L	133	55	49
M	195	32	12
N	306	61	47
O	262	34	30
P	722	117	51
Q	1,056	380	286
R	300	849	664
S	333	351	156
T	739	314	178
U	68	73	34
V	498	258	248
W	63	69	47
Harbor	67	179	29
Total	10,056	5,827	4,078

Appendix II- Surplus Parking Count & Residential and Commercial Calculations

Block	Surplus Parking Spaces	Housing Units 2 bedrooms	Commercial Square Footage
A- Public	5	2	1,500
A- Private	18	9	5,400
A-Total	23	11	6,900
B-Public	5	2	1,500
B-Private	29	14	8,700
B-Total	34	16	10,200
C-Public	3	1	900
C-Private	22	11	6,600
C-Total	25	12	7,500
D-Public	19	9	5,700
D-Private	95	47	28,500
D-Total	114	56	34,200
E-Public	4	2	1,200
E-Private	61	30	18,300
E-Total	65	32	19,500
F-Public	5	2	1,500
F-Private	0	0	0
F-Total	5	2	1,500
G-Public	7	3	2,100
G-Private	277	138	83,100
G-Total	284	141	85,200
H-Public	2	1	600
H-Private	44	22	13,200
H-Total	46	23	13,800
I-Public	53	26	15,900
I-Private	70	35	21,000
I-Total	123	61	36,900
J-Public	6	3	1,800
J-Private	61	30	18,300
J-Total	77	33	20,100
K-Public	23	11	6,900
K-Private	5	2	1,500
K-Total	28	13	8,400
L-Public	37	18	11,100
L-Private	0	0	0
L-Total	37	18	11,100
M-Public	2	1	600
M-Private	22	11	6,600
M-Total	24	12	7,200

N-Public	24	12	7,200
N-Private	0	0	0
N-Total	24	12	7,200
O-Public	8	4	2,400
O-Private	3	1	900
O-Total	11	5	3,300
P-Public	6	3	1,800
P-Private	66	33	19,800
P-Total	72	36	21,600
Q-Public	50	25	15,000
Q-Private	47	23	14,100
Q-Total	97	48	29,100
R-Public	162	81	48,600
R-Private	23	11	6,900
R-Total	185	92	55,500
S-Public	4	2	1,200
S-Private	195	97	58,500
S-Total	199	99	59,700
T-Public	4	2	1,200
T-Private	122	61	36,600
T-Total	126	63	37,800
U-Public	0	0	0
U-Private	39	19	11,700
U-Total	39	19	11,700
V-Public	19	9	5,700
V-Private	33	16	9,900
V-Total	52	25	15,600
W-Public	0	0	0
W-Private	22	11	6,600
W-Total	22	11	6,600
PUBLIC	**448**	**219**	**134,400**
PRIVATE	**1,264**	**621**	**376,200**
TOTAL	**1,712**	**840**	**510,600**

Appendix III- Map of Downtown Blocks



Appendix IV- Sources

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