

City of Birmingham
ADVISORY PARKING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING

Held Remotely Via Zoom And Telephone Access
Friday, June 3, 2020

MINUTES

These are the minutes of the Advisory Parking Committee ("APC") regular meeting held on Friday, June 3, 2020. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. by Chairman Al Vaitas.

1. Rollcall

Present: Chairman Al Vaitas
Vice-Chairwoman Gayle Champagne
Richard Astrein
Michael Horowitz
Steven Kalczynski (left at 9:00 a.m.)
Judith Paskiewicz
Lisa Silverman (left at 9:30 a.m.)
Jennifer Yert

Absent: Anne Honhart
Lisa Krueger

SP+ Parking: Catherine Burch
Sara Dixon
Jay O'Dell

Administration: Tiffany Gunter, Asst. City Manager
Mike Albrecht, Police Commander
Laura Eichenhorn, Transcriptionist

2. Recognition Of Guests

None.

3. Minutes

Due to discrepancies between the date of the minutes included in the agenda packets and the motions made at the last two APC meetings, the minutes of the May 6, 2020 APC meeting, the May 15, 2020 APC meeting, and the June 3, 2020 APC meeting will be reviewed and voted on at the Committee's July 16, 2020 meeting.

4. Master Plan Summary Committee Comments

ACM Gunter introduced the discussion.

There was consensus among the APC members that they would be supportive of bicycle racks in the garages as long as very few parking spaces were removed for their installation.

Chairman Vaitas said he would want the APC to review the bicycle racks' proposed installation locations in the garages should the idea be implemented in the future.

Mr. Horowitz said that in the near future people would probably use the bicycle racks in the garages to park electric bicycles as well. He said the City should not charge for bicycle parking, and should encourage bicycle use wherever appropriate.

On the topic of electric vehicle charges in the garages, Mr. Kalczynski noted that there are two kinds of chargers for electric vehicles currently: one that is proprietary to Tesla vehicles, and one that is universal to all other electric vehicles. He stated that the Tesla chargers were provided free of charge to the Townsend. Mr. Kalczynski recommended that the City reach out to Tesla to see if there would be an option to acquire free charging stations for the public garages if the City decides to pursue that option.

Mr. Horowitz said that the infrastructure for charging electric vehicles is developing in tandem with their use. He said there would likely be other places for electric vehicles to be charged, and that the City should not treat public garages as a place for electric vehicle owners to charge their vehicles.

Dr. Silverman and Chairman Vaitas agreed with Mr. Horowitz. Dr. Silverman suggested that the APC's and garages' focus is to serve the residents, and that given the distances they are driving from their homes to the garages electric vehicle charging would not be necessary.

Mr. Kalczynski observed that electric vehicle use in California is fairly ubiquitous. He also raised the point that the garages and the APC exist to serve the downtown business community as well as the residents and that visitors to Birmingham's businesses would likely be driving farther distances.

ACM Gunter suggested that if the garages are equipped with amenity bays for vehicles, a charging station could be demonstrated along with the bay to see the type of usage it gets.

Mr. Kalczynski and Chairman Vaitas both said the idea was worth exploring.

There was consensus that providing wayfinding information would be useful.

Mr. Horowitz stated that the pros would outweigh the cons of expanding outdoor dining opportunities in the City, even if it comes at the cost of 15 to 20 parking spaces.

Mr. Horowitz said it adds to the excitement and the vibrancy of the City, and that it might even encourage people to bicycle downtown if they know they would be able to dine outside. He asked Mr. Astrein for his perspective.

Mr. Kalczynski said he would also like to see outdoor dining opportunities expanded, even if it results in the loss of some parking spaces. He said that if there were more dining opportunities and art galleries the City would feel more lively and there would be a lot more foot traffic throughout the City on weekends.

Dr. Silverman said that every option should be explored to maximize outdoor dining opportunities in Birmingham while also trying to maintain as many parking spaces as possible. She said that increasing the dining capacity while decreasing parking may lead to frustration at the likely resulting increase in parking demand.

Chairman Vaitas said his concern with the dining decks is that while it expands restaurant seating, it decreases the available parking for the retail, which he said is unfair.

Mr. Astrein agreed with Chairman Vaitas. He said that expanding outdoor dining too much gives the restaurants an unfair advantage over other retailers. Mr. Astrein also added that studies show that most shopping is destination right now, which means that instead of visiting one location and then browsing others, most shoppers just visit their intended destination and leave the area. Given that pattern of shopping, he said there is little argument that there is a downstream effect for retail when restaurant dining expands.

Mr. Horowitz said that many malls are evolving from shopping centers to lifestyle centers, that create a more holistic experience for the consumer. Mr. Horowitz said that while he respected and requested Mr. Astrein's perspective, he would disagree that most shopping is trending towards destination-only. He said that from what he has been reading and observing there is overflow from one's intended destination into other shopping and retail opportunities if the environment is appropriately conducive.

Dr. Silverman said that expanding outdoor dining is less for the benefit of the restaurants and more for the benefit of Birmingham shoppers and diners. She agreed with Mr. Horowitz's description that it promotes a certain lifestyle experience that would benefit other retailers more than it would detract.

Chairman Vaitas observed that it has been the APC's focus in the past to preserve and create parking in Birmingham. He said that as a result he found it hard to argue that there is benefit to be derived from eliminating the parking that is available. He also said that expanding the outdoor dining decks can give the impression that the City is favoring one type of business over another, and that even if there was positive spillover to the other retailers it would not sufficiently balance out the lost parking.

Mr. Astrein said it could be appropriate to expand outdoor dining into the streets in the evening hours, while maintaining parking during the day for retail. He said that most retail is not open beyond 5:30 p.m. and would therefore not be negatively impacted by the lack of parking in the evenings.

There was consensus that the APC wanted the City to pursue outdoor dining expansion as aggressively as possible while being mindful of the impact on retail members of the business

community. There was also consensus that closing down or limiting parking on the streets for the expansion of outdoor dining in the evening hours would be an idea worth exploring further.

Mr. Horowitz agreed, saying that there was an appreciation of the value of outdoor dining decks among the Committee members, subject to the impact on other businesses.

Dr. Paskiewicz added that Committee review of the proposed outdoor dining would be part of the recommendations as well.

Mr. Horowitz said he was experiencing some frustration with both APC discussions and master plan recommendations in that there is a lot of effort to preserve smaller numbers of parking spaces, and less focus on more concrete plans to add a new garage or another similar solution. He noted that if a larger number of spaces were added, then smaller numbers of spaces could be removed for the installation of lifestyle improvements around the City.

There was consensus that the Committee would need more information about the potential uses for a Lot 6 pavilion in order to better understand its impact on parking.

Ms. Champagne suggested that the Farmer's Market could be moved in front of the Municipal Building on Sundays since the building is closed then, and the pavilion in adjacent Shain Park could be used for that and other activities.

Chairman Vaitas and Dr. Silverman said they liked Ms. Champagne's suggestion.

ACM Gunter stated she would incorporate the recommendation into the comments to the master planning team.

Ms. Yert and Chairman Vaitas stated that residential developments should have to include parking nearby.

Ms. Yert said that while she understood having to walk to more distant parking locations in larger cities, Birmingham was small enough that someone paying a significant amount to live downtown should have a parking space immediately available to them.

Dr. Paskiewicz said she was not concerned about the impact accessory dwelling units (ADUs) would have on parking. She said the ADUs would likely be slow to be built and adopted, and that residential streets already require permit parking.

Chairman Vaitas agreed with Dr. Paskiewicz.

There was consensus that the APC would be supportive of further exploration of parking development options for the Bates St. area with an emphasis on increased capacity.

In reply to Dr. Paskiewicz, ACM Gunter confirmed she would communicate that any of these recommendations should only be pursued once the City has had time to understand what the parking environment will be after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chairman Vaitas said he would like parking for Booth Park to be considered.

Dr. Paskiewicz said she was concerned that the parking at Booth Park could not be maintained for the primary use of the park visitors. She agreed with Chairman Vaitas, however, that the idea could be explored.

Mr. Horowitz agreed with Chairman Vaitas as well. He said that converting some of the parking from parallel to perpendicular parking could be an idea worth exploring in order to fit more spaces.

In reply to Dr. Paskiewicz and Chairman Vaitas, Mr. Horowitz did say that the parking might have to take away some of the sidewalk near Booth Park in order to be transitioned into perpendicular parking.

In reply to Mr. Astrein, ACM Gunter said she would likely know in early September 2020 who would be keeping their parking permits and who would be relinquishing them.

The APC agreed to take up discussion of residential permit parking at their next meeting.

5. Next Meeting: July 16, 2020

6. Adjournment

No further business being evident, the meeting adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Assistant City Manager Tiffany Gunter