



1. Executive Summary

Introduction

The City of Billings engaged Kimley-Horn and Associates (Kimley-Horn) to develop a Parking Strategic Plan for Downtown Billings, MT. The Plan will identify short and long term goals for the parking system and identify industry best practices that can be implemented in Billings to improve the operations, management, facilities and public perceptions of downtown parking.

Project Objectives

The primary goal of this parking strategic plan is to be a guide for decisions makers on topics such as governance, technology improvements, facilities, rates and enforcement. Specific project objectives including providing strategies and tools to:

- improve public perceptions of downtown parking
- make downtown parking a contributor to continued downtown redevelopment and economic expansion
- improve customer relations
- establish rate structures that recognize and strengthen parking as an integrated system
- promote parking turnover without unduly penalizing infrequent violators
- identify technology improvements that emphasize customer convenience, but will control operating costs and generate sufficient revenue to support system operations
- accommodate a growing residential population without negatively impacting retail and other sectors that need employee and customer parking
- incorporate parking as part of a balanced transportation system
- identify governance and management structures that will contribute to successful implementation of the other recommendations.

Report Organization

The basic organization of this Parking Strategic Plan includes the following key areas:

- Executive Summary
- Planning Context
- Current Conditions Overview
 - Program Organization
 - On-Street Parking System Overview
 - Off-Street Parking System Overview
- Limited Parking Supply/Demand Update
- Community Engagement Summary
- Parking Expert Advisory Panel Report
- Characteristics of Effective Parking Management Programs
- Parking System Organization and Management



- An Overview of On-Street Parking Technologies
- Parking Program Goals and Objectives
- Recommended Parking Program Guiding Principles
- Recommended Parking Program Action Items
 - Primary Action Items
 - Secondary Action Items
- Appendices/Parking Management Tool Kit

Key Findings

This report highlights the importance and complexity of parking as a critical element in the continued development and revitalization of Downtown Billings. With the recent investments in fine dining establishments, the refurbishment of historic downtown properties such as the Northern Hotel, continually increasing popularity of downtown events like Alive After 5, the Strawberry Festival, Harvest Festival, etc. and a growing downtown residential population, activity in Downtown Billings is increasing. To keep pace with increased downtown development, investments in new parking infrastructure have also been made. The new Empire Garage has raised the bar in Billings in terms of parking facility design.

While the amount of parking available is currently sufficient to meet current needs and even to accommodate the several small development projects that are on the immediate horizon, any significant new projects will likely require additional structured parking. Leveraging parking investment as a tool to incentivize development projects that align with the goals of Downtown Framework Plan is seen as an important community and economic development strategy (See Appendix C – Parking as an Economic Development Strategy).

Based on preliminary research and early discussions with community members, it was the consultant team's initial impression that the Billings parking system was in serious trouble and was potentially in need of a major restructuring and systems overhaul. Having completed the program assessment our view is much different. Based on an extensive community engagement process (See Appendix Y for a summary of the community engagement process and Appendix Z for a summary of the Parking Expert Advisory Panel findings), the consultant team now sees a parking program that has a solid foundation in terms of physical and system assets upon which to build. We were also impressed with the quality of the City and Downtown management staff overall.

What the program currently needs most are six key elements:

1. **A Sense of Purpose and Direction** – this strategic plan should provide that missing element
2. **A Strong and Capable Program Leader** – the recent hiring of a new parking manager (an upgrade from the previous program leader whose title was Parking Supervisor) is seen as a very positive step
3. **An Investment in Staff Training and Development** – We are impressed with the new parking manager and feel she has many of the right qualities and management skills to be successful; however, she lacks specific parking management experience. This is not uncommon in the industry (after all, there are no college degree programs for Parking Management – at least not yet). There will be a steep learning curve. However, with the right investment in professional development, education and the building of an effective network of peers, we are confident that



Tracy and her staff can rise to the occasion. Given this situation, this report provides an extensive assortment of tools, sample manuals, white papers on various specialized parking elements and a rich collection of parking management best practices to aid in the staff education and development process.

4. **A Strong Customer Service Orientation** – one of the key leadership elements that needs to be infused into the program going forward is a strong customer service focus. This applies to not only to staff training but also to facilities maintenance and investments in new technologies. Parking can play a key role in improving the perception and the experience of downtown. Collaboration and partnerships with the Downtown Billings Association will be an important component of this element.
5. **A Focus on “Mastering the Fundamentals” of Parking Management** – While related to the training and staff development element, this focus area is really about gaining an in-depth understanding of the many complex and challenging aspects that are somewhat unique to parking. Chapter 7 of this report (Characteristics of Effective Parking Management Programs) provides a strong framework built around 20 specific program categories that can form the basis for a comprehensive program development approach. Between this chapter and the wealth of tools provided in the Appendices, there are numerous program elements, both short and long term that can transform the Billings parking program into one of the best municipal programs in the country over time.
6. **Investment in New Technology** – Leveraging new technology will be a critical element in achieving many of the stated goals of this project including:
 - a. Enhanced customer friendly programs and services
 - b. Improved operational efficiency
 - c. Enhanced system financial performance
 - d. Improve system management

Primary Action Items

Beginning on page 98 are the recommended “primary action items. Below is summary listing of these key recommendations:

Primary Action Item #1: Adopt New Program Vision and Mission Statements and Recommended Parking Program Guiding Principles – Implement Parking Management Best Practices

Primary Action Item # 2: Invest in New On-Street and Off-Street Parking Technology

Primary Action Item # 3: Leverage Parking as a Community and Economic Development Strategy and Develop a Comprehensive Parking Planning Function

Primary Action Item # 4: Develop a Proactive Facility Maintenance Program Including Regular Facility Condition Appraisals, Prioritized Facility Rehabilitation Plans and the Creation of Parking Facility Maintenance Reserves

Primary Action Item #5: Develop a New Parking Program Brand and Marketing Program

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Primary Action Item # 6: Develop a “Business Continuity Plan” to address the fact that the City’s primary parking Equipment Manufacturer (Federal APD) is “Going out of Business”. Define long-term system needs.

Primary Action Item # 7: Invest in Training and Staff Development with a Goal of Mastering the Fundamentals of Parking System Management and Operations

Primary Action Item # 8: Create a More Vertically Integrated Downtown Parking System and Re-Focus and Re-Energize the Parking Advisory Board

Primary Action Item # 9: Expand the Scope of the Parking Program over Time to be More Supportive and Inclusive of Supporting Alternative Modes Transportation and Embrace More of an “Access Management Philosophy”

Primary Action Item # 10: Reassess the Courtesy Ticket Program and Meter Bagging Policies

Primary Action Item # 11: Critically Assess the Current Parking Enforcement Program Using the Tools Provided

In Conclusion

The development of a strategic vision and a strong, well defined action plan was a critical first step in putting the Billings parking program on a trajectory for success and we applaud the community’s recognition of this fact and for making this important investment.

It is exciting to see the progress being made in downtown Billings. Parking can be a significant partner and contributor to advancing the community’s economic development goals as well helping to improve the overall downtown experience. We are confident with the strong team of City leaders, an engaged and supportive Mayor and City Council, a strong downtown organization and new investments in parking program development that the future of downtown is bright indeed. Now the real work on parking program improvement begins!