A SUSTAINABLE PARKING FRONTIER

By Jeff Petry

Leading practitioners of sustainable parking practices are incorporating electric vehicle charging stations, solar panels, bike corrals, shared car programs, LED lighting, green operational policies, and renewable energy sources. In many ways, these characteristics are off-the-shelf purchases that can be made by any parking operation or municipality. Further, we have industry partners who can help us understand the available technologies to help us find the best products. Great!


How might we make neighborhoods more livable?
Is parking staff integrated with your neighborhood programs, and do they attend neighborhood meetings? Is your residential permit program one contiguous zone or is it a patchwork of regulated and un-regulated parking? Have you thought about converting the rooftop of a parking structure to a community garden?

How might we change the perception of parking enforcement?
Have you thought about inserting a coupon from a local business in lieu of a parking ticket, a la “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory?” Are your parking enforcement officers dressed in dark blue uniforms, or do they wear khakis or even Hawaiian shirts?

How might we define building codes to encourage the right amount of parking?
Does your building code encourage sustainable parking practices? Does it have maximum parking standards to discourage large retail stores from sizing lots for their busiest day of the year? Does your high-density residential code count shared parking and double parking stalls towards minimum requirements?

How might we use on-street parking spaces differently?
Have you thought about taking the next step beyond PARK(ing) Day, selling on-street parking spaces to adjacent residents or businesses, and allowing them to decide whether to use them as vehicle parking or something else? Do your parking space permits allow curbside vending or even an old-time bookmobile?

These questions are meant to illicit a reaction and challenge our assumptions of what sustainability means for municipal parking operations. Parking can act as the catalyst that brings economic, environmental, and equity components together through policy, incentives, and conversations. It will look different in every community, but it will work to balance sustainability dimensions. At the end of the day, successful sustainable communities will be the ones that work cooperatively within the municipal organizations, actively work with their community partners, and have the ability to innovate to meet changing needs.

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