

Townise

TRANSITIONS



Resort towns face special challenges when it comes to parking management plans.



By Brian Andersen, CAPP, MBA

Over the years, I have witnessed the parking metamorphosis of Park City, Utah, which is a resort town. The city's skiing is legendary and attracts many to this beautiful region, but its proximity to an urban area and major airport hub has generated some parking challenges. As far back as the late 1970s, merchants in the Main Street commercial district have been engaged in parking issues. An article in a local paper from that era recorded angst over a rule that implemented no-parking from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.—I assume this was to facilitate snow removal. The regulation is still in place and the snow still accumulates. The only difference between then and now is that the number of people who enjoy the snow has increased, necessitating additional parking regulations.

In 1996, I began my parking career facilitating a valet-assist experiment that was designed to pack more cars into key commercial lots during the peak evening dinner hour to help hungry skiers who spent all day on the mountain. A year later, a parking division was formed and contracted enforcement services were managed under the public works umbrella rather than the police. The police chief loved this change! He often mused about how riled up a person could get over a parking ticket.

In 1998, we installed multi-space meters for the entire downtown commercial core. The solution was driven by a city council that preferred solving problems proactively (possibly too much so). Merchants contended locals were not frequenting Main Street, but data indicated no real change in sales tax revenue. In 2003, meters were removed from lots adjacent to Main Street leaving this key corridor as the only metered parking remaining, which was just enough to break even. Additionally that year, the meters were converted to solar power. In 2006 a parking structure addition was built and the multi-space meters were replaced with a newer generation.

Today, there are ongoing discussions about residential permit program tweaks, wayfinding, metered parking, and the integration of technology. What is a parking

professional to do? It seems we should stick to what we do best and work the problems we are given. This takes all the resources we have at our fingertips and then some.

The Initial Problem

Resort towns are usually places of natural beauty. When we drive to a ski or beach town for vacation, we are generally happy just to find a parking space close to our activities for the day. Of course this is true wherever we go; it's human nature to feel elation when we find that close-in parking space. We usually don't consider the demands placed on the town from increased parking demand or the solutions used to make our experience a good one. Often this evolution is based on topography, discovery, growth, and change. When the problem of too many cars grows, the visitor experience is negatively affected and a resort town parking manager is brought on-board.

If you are in these shoes, identifying the problem you are trying to solve is critical. A good initial resource is a parking consultant—one who understands the resort business and the uniqueness of resort parking challenges and is willing to learn your specific parking challenges. This will likely involve questioning the planning guidelines as they relate to parking, gathering and



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studying parking use and duration data, and engaging many constituents at the decision table. Examples of constituency groups that were involved in our town's program included merchant, lodging, and restaurant associations; employee groups; private parking owners; and affected city departments.

In Park City, the initial problem was brought to the attention of elected officials by the business community, specifically the merchants of our Main Street core. Not surprisingly, in many cases, the businesses' own employees were taking up the spaces. Before hiring professional help or employing dedicated staff to tackle the problem, several unsuccessful solutions were attempted: two-hour time limits with no enforcement, two-hour time limits with the words "strictly enforced," without enforcement (don't laugh), two-hour time limits enforced with one part-time officer, and a valet-assist experiment. Eventually, city staff realized the need to hire a good consultant and begin developing a management program with dedicated staff and a revenue stream. The staff size grew from one person working the program as a side project to a full-time division with a parking manager and dedicated enforcement officers.

Key Challenges of Resort Town Parking

Creative solutions abound in the resort environment. At first glance, it seems everyone is a parking expert because they drive a car. Indeed some ideas are not fit for implementation, but our industry embraces the creative, and some of the most creative solutions I have seen are found in the resort environment. The following are key challenges faced by the resort parking manager:

1. A well-connected constituency. Our town is small enough that just about everyone knows the mayor and city council members. The challenge this presents to parking management is that the policy makers can become involved in the minutia of parking management instead of setting policy. Countless hours of staff time are dedicated to the follow-up of ticket complaints received at the mayor's office.

2. Seasonal demand. Fluctuation in our economy remains one of our most challenging issues. In Park City we call the spring and fall the shoulder seasons, with demand peaking during the busy winter and summer times. Our business district parking resources are primarily shared public parking spaces, and when they are empty, there is intense pressure to make them free.

3. Need for a wide range of staff skills. Many times, the parking manager in a resort town needs to be a jack of all trades. That is certainly the case for the other employees in the parking division and me. Tasks that might require a dedicated employee in a larger organization are often "other duties as assigned" within our department. Similarly, our enforcement officers clean and maintain meters and collect use data. Our office staff collects meter fees, analyzes data, installs signs, and contracts for parking structure maintenance and cash transport, and the list goes on. While all resort towns may not assign work in the same way, I am confident that in most resort towns, there are times when the manager and staff have to get their hands dirty in the field.

4. Interesting events. Almost all resort towns draw unique events. Park City plays host to the Sundance Film Festival, which brings approximately 10 days of very heightened parking demand. The size of the event and traffic it generates require the city to manage parking to reduce traffic demand. For example, the metered rate in one lot during this event is \$16 for three hours; the non-event rate would be \$4.50 for the same amount of time. Without a reduction in cars brought about by these increased fees, traffic has proven to increase to the point of gridlock.

5. Demand for technology. Resort visitors expect the newest parking technologies, pay-by-cell, online resolution of tickets, and smartphone applications. This requires a lot of procurements on already-lean staff time. In the past, I relied on my IT department merely for server connections to the parking database, but now, all technology-based procurements require their valuable input and our careful consideration for things such as data storage and backup, server capacity or hosting, and data handling policies for LPR. While this may also be the case for larger cities, there are no specialists to dedicate to IT issues within our staff. And in a tourist-based economy, we give exceptional care to the needs of our visitors.

Resort town parking management offers a great opportunity to work in parking while living in a beautiful place. I guess that's why I've worked for Park City Municipal Corporation since 1990 and managed its Main Street parking program since 1998, and been in Park City so long. If you are a resort parking professional who would like a forum to get together to solve your problems and share information unique to tourist-based economies, please get in touch—we would like to assist you. **P**



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