

PARKING AS PUBLIC



POLICY PRIORITY

The argument for parking as public administration policy.

By Perry Eggleston, CAPP

For years, we've heard the joke, "What does parking policy have in common with jumbo shrimp? Some experts say both are oxymorons." Historically speaking, parking planning was left to the urban planner, who used antiquated space ratios to determine parking requirements for new construction projects. When a government agency decides to implement some kind of control, it looks to its neighbors and no one seems to recall the rationale for such policies.

As land becomes less available, its value has risen. Additionally, sustainability demands are increasing, and municipalities and universities are looking to public administrators to develop new policies on how to manage parking in their jurisdictions. There is a distinct need among professional parking managers to use more of a public administrative process when creating planning, enforcement, and pay-for-parking policies.

Parking Is Public Policy

The purpose of parking regulation is to control the use of a limited resource. Without regulation, there would be little regard for safety or organization. For example, note the chaos at youth athletic events at local parks or schools. Drivers often park without regard for the safety of others, focusing solely on locating a space as close as possible to where their children are playing. It quickly becomes obvious that human nature takes over human rationality.

When public administrators become involved, policies are created to address local land use regulations, human nature, minimum parking requirements, flexibility in those requirements, and parking standards for local municipalities or governmental authorities. With good planning, parking becomes organized, rational, and fair. These standards increase the amount of available parking space without necessarily increasing the actual inventory of parking spaces.

"Without parking, automobiles would be useless, but in cities, parking consumes vast spaces that preempt other uses and make other mobilities incongruent," wrote Jason Henderson. San Francisco is wrestling with

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this issue. New policies are being constructed to reduce parking, and thus, automobile use. These new policies are butting up against traditional political movements that lean toward requiring more parking spaces, in direct opposition to new trends.

A November 2007 ballot measure would have allowed for the construction of additional parking in San Francisco. This was at a time when transportation, neighborhood, and environmental activists were successful in reducing parking in the city. The measure was defeated, and the parking debate continues. “As local responses to global warming, energy consumption, and the social justice implications of automobiles proliferate, San Francisco provides a poignant example for scholars, activists, and policymakers interested in how the challenges to the automobile and its parking spaces are unfolding,” Henderson wrote.

Removing parking spaces is not a popular movement across the U.S. Even in New York City, where congestion is king, the removal of parking spaces has not become an overwhelming issue. Flexible reuse of buildings is limited due to local parking regulations. To meet minimum-parking requirements, investors are required to tear down core building structures. Parking is more than differences over the number of spaces; it is about the cities’ values and urban space uses.

Adding to Existing Theory

In his discussion of balancing on- and off-street fees, Donald Shoup provided an argument for rational, cost-efficient, and consistent parking policy. He provided theoretical support to parking spaces being a resource needing management to prevent vehicle congestion. His research compared his model with current planning practices among parking professionals and proposed changes to their professional organization. However, Shoup’s research did not directly include the need for effective enforcement to ensure compliance with on-street parking regulations.

Parking management should be removed from the discipline of strict urban planning and put into the area of public administration policy. These policies should include processes of pricing, financial assessment, and fines to ensure compliance and sufficient revenue to maintain operations. Using public administration policies, parking organizations would be better prepared to navigate the various political currents they face.

Shoup focused on a model of balanced fee structures, which research argues must be included in comprehensive parking planning. Imbalanced fees create imbalanced demand on the less-expensive parking facility and encourage drivers to drive in circles, wasting gas and time to seek cheaper parking spaces.

Because many parking agencies are self-funded by fees and fines, it is imperative that organizations develop policies that address the need for effective enforcement. This would include balancing fees and fines to encourage compliance and increase revenue. Unlike traditional business models in which supply and demand can be easily determined, the concept of self-funding through fine and fee structures is difficult to analyze and calculate. As James Hunnicutt, CAPP, said, “No one drives to a parking location just to look at the parking facility ... parking is a service to something else.”

Include Enforcement

The purpose of parking management is to control a limited, and some perceive, declining resource. Urban planning studies mandate the use of formulas to determine the minimum number of parking spaces to be included in a construction project. Shoup’s proposed model would change demand by creating equal pricing. It would adjust the cost to park based on demand and ensure that on- and off-street parking pricing models are equal.

The intent of on-street parking is to provide a short-term space with regular turnover that ensures adequate space availability. Pricing for these spaces should be as high as or higher than their off-street counterparts. If the on-street spaces are not occupied, lower the pricing to



return to a level of equilibrium. “Parking policy should respond to human behavior and not formula-bound engineering,” Hunnicutt wrote.

The best practices for parking management, policy development, and implementation would focus on operations that are responsive to those they serve. While the cost to park on the street and in area garages should parallel each other, so should the use of an equally effective fine structure. As balanced on- and off-street fees direct demand, an effectively balanced fine structure will encourage compliance and the expected turnover of the parking space that Shoup recommends.

Heretofore, parking enforcement and fines have been an afterthought in organizational planning and not included in research. Adding a balanced fine structure will allow organizations to forecast revenue so they might plan maintenance, construction, and increases to their service levels by creating more revenue in compliance.

By adopting a public policy approach during the parking planning process and implementing a balanced fee and fine approach, parking professionals will increase customer satisfaction and recoup sufficient revenue for operations. Collecting parking fees is already a hot topic in many locations; an imbalanced fine structure creates additional customer confusion and dissatisfaction along with the associated political dissonance.

More Research Is Required

The topic of public policy and balanced fees and fines suffers a gap in research despite the consensus on its importance. This gap includes the enforcement component in the development of local parking policy. Municipalities and universities have been collecting parking fees for more than 80 years, but many organizations do not clearly understand how to implement parking fees and fines. This problem is compounded by political entities hesitant to make changes—there is fear that adjustments will negatively affect constituent perceptions of lawmakers’ intent. The goal is to provide the service that is expected from customers, along with sufficient parking space availability, through an effective enforcement program that works to increase compliance.

Municipal parking professionals are working with parking regulations written in the 1970s with no modification to allow professionals to adjust fees and fines with changing demand. Minimum parking requirements require that sufficient parking is available for the highest demand periods even when these high-demand periods only occur annually or at certain times. New-construction investors may even add to the minimum-parking requirements to protect their investment value in case of a building use change in the future.

Further investigation of implementing fees and balancing them with the appropriate fine structures can assist parking professionals by providing enough parking spaces for their customers while maintaining a sufficient revenue stream to maintain operations. Scholars and practitioners working together to develop effective parking policies could increase the quality of life for their constituents, reduce congestion, and ensure sufficient revenue to maintain or increase services.

Conclusion

There is a need for additional research to assist government agencies in supporting balancing fees and fines and addressing the needs of users and constituents. Research of specific public administration policies and theories in the parking industry is long overdue. City council or local executive branch changes may change the mission of the organization. In these situations, parking administrators must have policies in place that are inherently fair to citizens while providing for the effective use of the limited parking inventory. By using a balanced fee and fine approach as a foundational step, these professionals maintain fairness to those they serve and create fiscally sound parking policies.

Parking professionals can begin this by first including parking enforcement in pricing policies. This will ensure the highest levels of compliance are experienced. Second, review fee and fine levels. Seek a balance that encourages compliance while maintaining sufficient revenue sources for continued operation. Third, participate in the discussion both locally and nationally by attending meetings and conferences that allow the opportunity to learn from and teach others about effective parking policies.

As municipalities and universities wrestle with declining land availability, increased demand for greener operations, and increased costs for the maintenance of parking facilities, there will be more demand on parking planners to use public policy models. “The lack of large-scale data on public parking fees and fines and public planning that relates to parking has hampered such analysis,” wrote Rachel Weinberger, Amy Auchincloss, and Semra Aytur in the November 2014 issue of *The Parking Professional*. While parking pricing policies could influence travel choices (using mass transit, walking, or biking), the public’s perceived dependence on the automobile has, as Weinberger and her colleagues wrote, “fostered fierce opposition to increasing the cost of parking, making the political cost difficult to overcome.” The biggest political cost to overcome is the perception that parking is free. Using public policy as a parking management tool, administrators can begin to combat this.



PERRY EGGLESTON, CAPP, is director of parking and transportation services at the University of Texas at Arlington. He can be reached at eggleston@uta.edu or 817.272.3907.