Six Ways Hiring a **PARKING** Consultant Can Save Time and Money, and Reduce Aggravation on Your Next Project

Whether you’re an architect, urban planner, or head of a parking department, getting advice from a parking consultant at the earliest stages of a project can really pay off.

When people enter a city, university, hospital, airport, or any other large institution, what are their critical first and last impressions? Their parking experiences. A well-designed and properly managed parking operation ensures vehicular and pedestrian safety, easy access to spaces, smooth transportation flow, maximum efficiency, sustainability, comfort, and aesthetic appeal.

From an owner’s perspective, guaranteeing that positive experience involves a myriad of complex considerations. Parking facilities are unique structures, built to withstand 50 to 75 years of use with regular maintenance, but they are vulnerable to harsh environmental conditions. Providing low-cost and consistent availability to the user requires highly technical predictions of supply and demand. Each day ushers in unforeseen challenges and decisions—new construction vs. rehabilitation, space constraints, alternative-transportation options, changing landscapes, technological improvements, and the whims of Mother Nature are just a few.

Parking is also an important planning resource and can have an effect on many land-use decisions. When managed effectively, parking can help foster safety on local roadways or on a campus; improve the quality of life for residents of a community; enhance the customer experience for people visiting airports, hospitals, or retail centers; and help promote the development and ongoing success of local businesses.

When coordinated with public transit and other alternative transportation services, parking can also help promote sustainability.

**Parking Matters® to ...**
- Project Planning
- Mobility and Access
- Smart Transportation
- Economic Development
- Architectural Design
- Safety and Security
- Technology Integration
- Quality of Life
Parking consultants are uniquely qualified to compile and examine the data required to make these planning decisions and to develop parking plans and programs that can help municipalities, hospitals, universities, developers, and building owners achieve successful outcomes.

Here are some of the ways hiring a parking consultant can potentially save time and money, while reducing aggravation for years to come:

1. **Understanding the big parking (and transportation) picture**

When trying to solve a parking issue, companies and organizations often tap local construction and engineering experts and executives whose expertise is in planning and building—not parking. Parking consultants are trained to analyze your current parking situation, recommend solutions, and provide guidance in upfront and master planning, financial feasibility, design, construction, restoration, site alternatives, operations, and maintenance. Armed with a knowledge of best practices, they can suggest revisions in design and operations that can mean the difference between a smoothly running parking program and one that’s plagued with problems and chokepoints.

Before embarking on design and development, it’s beneficial to have a consultant conduct a parking study that assesses the current situation and projects needs that may arise during the next five, 10, or 15 years. A consultant can help you meet demand without overbuilding, avoiding unnecessary costs and saving valuable resources.

What appears to be a major shortage or problem requiring a new structure might be solvable with a few design adjustments, operational realignments, changes in pricing or permitting, and/or by identifying other parking options nearby.

2. **Providing a broad, cross-sector perspective**

Parking consultants work in many diverse environments, from medical centers to municipalities, and offer a broad perspective on creative parking solutions that can prove invaluable, says Shawn Conrad, CAE, chief executive officer of the International Parking Institute (IPI), the largest association of parking professionals. “Our member consultants have amassed tremendous experience working with a variety of parking sectors,” he says. “What has worked well for a city may benefit an airport or university. Busy parking managers might not have the time to be up on all the latest research, and a consultant can help them tap into what’s happening across sectors and around the world.”

Even for organizations that have a seasoned parking professional on staff, a consultant can help provide consensus. As Peyton Haralson, director of the Tulsa Parking Authority explains, “Very often the parking
consultant and I have been in agreement, but it’s always good to have an extra set of eyes reviewing a project or challenge a city faces, and a consultant can help the process of moving the project forward.”

3 Knowing the latest in parking technology

The parking industry has undergone a dramatic technological transformation during the past few years, most noticeably in sustainability and efficiency. This industry revolution has created many new opportunities for municipalities and other large institutions to improve customer service, increase revenue, facilitate parking enforcement, meet sustainability goals, and make the parking experience more efficient and customer-friendly. To fully harness the ever-expanding technology, it’s wise to start early in the planning process. A consultant can help navigate the sometimes daunting decisions to be made in integrating technology with existing systems.

That’s what Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., discovered when it embarked on its goal to make its entire parking and transportation system sustainable, beginning with the Forest Home Garage. This innovative, 254-space, three-level garage was built into a hillside, with a stone façade designed to blend into the natural surroundings. “We realized we would benefit from working with a consultant at the beginning of this process,” says Bridgette Brady, CAPP, Cornell’s director of transportation services. “They understood the documentation process and helped us identify certification points that didn’t require retrofit measures. We would’ve spent far more on employee training to match their in-house expertise.”

4 Taking the heat — so you don’t have to

Because parking consultants are neutral third parties, they are able to take the heat that typically comes in an organizational hierarchy—especially when it involves a controversial new project. For example, access to prime parking spaces close to an office or lecture hall is considered a valuable perk within many institutions, and the battle for those spots can create dissent that hampers productivity.

Consultants can help circumvent internal politics by backing you up on decisions that may affect others within the organization. They have no stake in your institution or organization and are able to offer unbiased opinions.

“Decisions like whether to demolish or repair a badly deteriorating facility can easily get bogged down in internal red tape,” says Gary Means, CAPP, executive director of the Lexington Parking Authority in Kentucky. “A parking consultant helps you move forward on rehabilitation or new construction and ensure that parking capacity, revenue, and customer service aren’t needlessly compromised.”

5 Saving money in the long run

The average cost of a new parking garage is now almost $10 million; whatever your budget, you want to ensure that all the expenditures associated with a parking solution won’t exceed the bottom line. A parking consultant can expertly project all the costs associated with a new facility, from design and construction to legal fees; identify methods of
financing; put proposals out to bid and facilitate the hiring process; and provide guidance on projecting a facility’s future cash flow.

When undertaking a new parking project, a consultant could identify cost-effective, long-term features you may not have considered. An investment in energy-efficient lighting, for example, can reap huge savings in energy consumption, often paying for itself in a few years. Perhaps the project will have a future need to access public transportation or add retail and options that will generate revenue. Parking consultants have the specialized training and experience to help you develop a program that not only addresses your current needs, but also predict possible environmental concerns and changing usage patterns going forward. You’ll save money in unforeseen ways and conserve resources for infrastructure needs in the future.

6 Be your trusted partner as your program evolves

After you’ve made the substantial investment in a new parking structure, an annual or bi-annual review can help identify and address maintenance and rehabilitation issues. On the operations side, regular audits can help your operation keep current with best practices in parking and current technology. A parking consultant can also help determine whether your garages and lots are sufficient to meet your organization’s needs and determine when—or if—a new structure is truly warranted.

“It can really pay off to have a parking consultant review your facility and make sure it’s well-maintained to maximize its value,” says Rick Decker, CAPP, manager of parking operations for the busy Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport. “An audit can help you identify where things aren’t running as smoothly as possible and help you employ best practices so you can continue to get the most from your investment.”