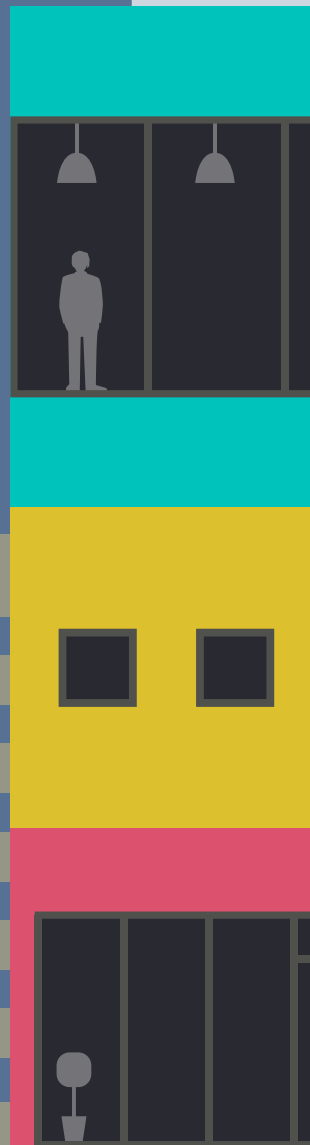



# Managing Municipal Parking

*Creating and  
maintaining an  
effective operation  
requires synergy  
in the system.*



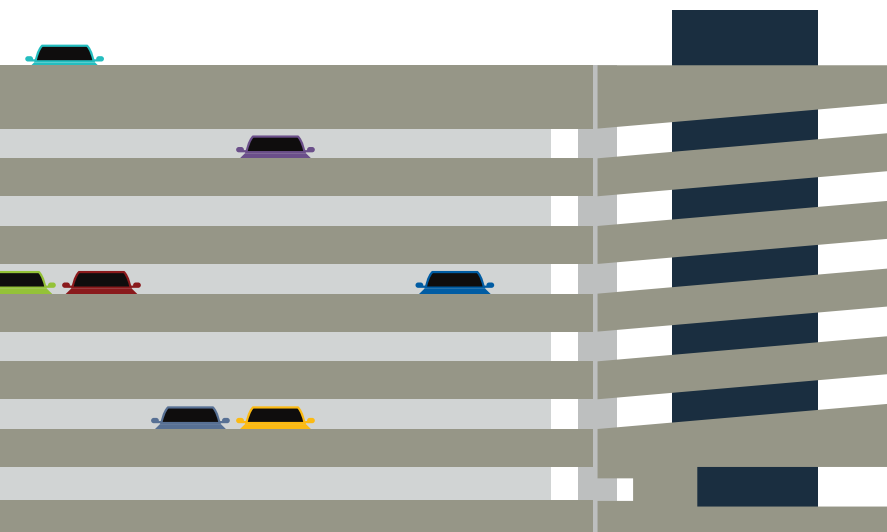
By Daniel Fortinberry, CAPP



**A**lthough municipal parking operations may vary slightly and be concentrated to one or more components that make up the system, the general design usually includes a mix of on- and off-street parking and in some cases, a violations-processing department with or without operation of a vehicle impound facility. In all cases, the primary goal of a municipal parking system remains the same: to ensure adequate and accessible parking for users. Equally important is the underlying and unofficial focus of providing a service to visitors, employees, customers, and business owners without directly competing with private operators.

This balancing act has created numerous challenges for municipal parking systems, whether they are operated by a city, a parking authority, or have been outsourced through a public-private partnership. The idea that municipal parking systems are designed to be revenue-expense-neutral is quickly becoming an antiquated notion, and managers are always searching for ways to realize increased financial benefits from their municipal parking operations. The upside to this new reality is that when they're managed correctly, municipal parking systems are uniquely designed to meet these needs and eliminate traditional obstacles to growth and profitability, significantly contributing to economic development.

Thanks to the direct correlation of municipal parking operations and successful economic development, city managers and top officials are taking notice of municipal parking more than ever and demanding much more of the parking professionals responsible for managing municipal parking systems. This has created a need to find innovative and strategic approaches to operating municipal parking.



**The key to operating a successful municipal parking operation is leveraging the system design and creating synergy within the structure.**

### **The Business Model**

The key to operating a successful municipal parking operation is leveraging the system design and creating synergy within the structure. This can be accomplished by creating a business model that places the responsibility and decision-making authority within one department with a leader and management staff who are empowered to drive results by:

- Maximizing revenue.
- Eliminating, reducing, and controlling expenses.
- Removing traditional causes of inefficiency and ineffectiveness.
- Creating and implementing customer service programs that best serve the users of the parking system.

Creating synergy by leveraging the system design of a municipal parking operation has multiple benefits, and the system design creates an environment that allows for cost savings and maximized revenue. This same design and approach to managing municipal parking places the parking professional strategically in the middle of economic development activity, which is essential due to the direct effect of parking on successful positive growth within a developing market.

A centrally controlled decision-making model allows the parking professional to operate the system as a business instead of an amenity. Although labor and management agreements may create special circumstances that limit taking full advantage of the system design, some strategies can create synergy that will lead to long-term sustainable growth for the parking system and success for the municipality it serves.

Strategies that leverage the system design can be divided into areas that positively affect the operation based on financial results, increase the operational effectiveness and efficiency, reduce risk to the organization, and positively impact economic development.

### **Cross-trained Staff**

Cross-training your parking staff to work at a high level in all the functional divisions of the parking system is critical to leveraging the system design of a municipal parking operation. A cross-trained parking staff reduces downtime in garages and on the street by ensuring fully trained backup employees are at the ready, thus maintaining and, in some instances, increasing the time during which revenue can be collected.

Operationally, a cross-trained staff benefits the organization by allowing for a more efficient staffing and scheduling process; cross-training employees also creates career paths for high-performing, motivated employees. This allows the management team to utilize employees where they are most suited and enjoy working while increasing employee satisfaction and retention by varying work assignments and reducing monotony.

### **Common Policies and Procedures**


Developing policies and procedures is at best a difficult task that can be further complicated when each division of a parking operation is responsible for developing separate policies and procedures. With the exception of very specific details related to the different positions within separate functional departments of a municipal parking operation, policies and procedures are similar.

The obvious benefit to having shared policies and procedures is the elimination of redundancy. A shared set of policies and procedures creates consistency within the parking operation, streamlines processes and decision-making, and allows the parking operation to create, implement, and be accountable to a common set of goals and objectives. Common policies and procedures give management and staff a consistent environment to operate with fewer obstacles related to efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Shared Assets and Costs**

Another opportunity to leverage the system design and create synergy with a parking operation is through the deliberate consolidation of assets and costs, specifically fixed expenses such as personnel, office space, utilities, taxes, and other related costs. High-dollar expenses such as IT service contracts, insurance, and debt service can also be reduced as a result of consolidation and eliminating redundancy with the operation. The ability to eliminate and consolidate support personnel for several different divisions within the parking system is the best opportunity for savings. The technology-driven business models of today offer a seemingly endless supply of applications for handling human resources, accounts payable and receivable, accounting, reporting, etc. that allow for greater efficiency and effectiveness with a smaller workforce.





**WE  
KNOW  
CITIES.  
YOU  
SHOULD  
KNOW  
US.**

We make smart applications for payments,  
management, and reporting  
[passportinc.com](https://passportinc.com)

**Passport**



In addition to personnel-cost consolidation savings, the system design of a well-managed municipal parking operation allows for other cost reductions and benefits with regard to vehicle fleets, maintenance shops, equipment repair turnaround times, customer service response time, and monthly reporting. Sharing costs and assets within the parking system increases efficiency and effectiveness and can contribute to positive bottom-line growth.

### **Risk Reduction/Business Continuity**

The cyclical nature of parking and the direct effect of economic factors on a municipal parking operation expose the system to considerable risk. New construction and traffic grid changes affect on-street operations, and a soft economy impacts businesses and employees in downtown areas. This directly affects the off- and on-street operations' ability to deliver positive financial results. Companies moving from the downtown to other locations or simply going out of business can influence the parking demand for a municipality.

The likelihood of one or more of these situations occurring at any given time is probable, but the system design can mitigate this negative impact significantly: It allows for ebb-and-flow activity within a market by balancing high-performing divisions with the underperforming ones. This risk reduction and balancing act is not possible within a fragmented parking system.

### **Expert in the Market/Single Point of Contact**

The realization that parking is integral for long-term, sustainable economic growth has been the impetus for parking professionals who can analyze markets, gather statistical data, interpret and report on this data, and create and implement parking management plans for municipal parking operations. Parking professionals are now part of the planning and development stages of development projects, fully involved with business planning and budgeting for cities and municipalities, and completely engaged with the community leaders and officials. They are experts in their markets.

A fragmented parking system that cannot leverage the system design can only offer a limited professional opinion in matters that require a comprehensive view. A parking system is thusly named in that it represents an organization that has parts that are affected by other

parts. The on-street operation is integral for a successful off-street operation and vice versa. Properly managed parking systems can effectively manage parking supply and demand by adjusting rates, enforcement, and hours of operation.

Parking information needs to be complete and comprehensive in order to be a benefit to the economic development process. Having a single point of contact who is a professional in the industry is the best way to ensure that parking is an asset to a developing market.

### **Customer-focused Service Model**

Parking is a service, and a successful parking operation holds to the same principles any customer-service-oriented business does. And just as with any customer-service-oriented business, municipal parking operations are concerned with attracting, retaining, and creating faithful returning customers. Moreover, it can be argued that municipal parking operations are held to even higher standards of service due to the nature of business and the fact that they deal with the public domain. The same advantages outlined regarding the system design and synergy-related efficiency, effectiveness, and cost savings can be applied to providing outstanding customer

service. A fragmented parking operation can offer only a portion of the customer service completion loop.

A customer's experience with parking may include finding accessible parking, paying for parking, receiving a citation, appealing a citation, and paying for a citation. When the response to and management of these activities occur within a single department, the customer service completion loop can be closed with little to no unacceptable delay. When this chain of activity is broken into links that are handled by separate entities or departments, there is a greater risk of providing less than satisfactory customer service.

Knowing that customers' perception of their parking experience can form their opinion of their total experience should create the desire for parking system managers to provide the best customer service possible.

Leveraging the system design and creating synergy within a municipal parking operation is possible and can be accomplished by making a plan that holds the goals and objectives of the parking operation at the forefront, collecting good information, educating those that will benefit from the results, and staying the course through potential resistance. **P**

**The technology-driven business models of today offer a seemingly endless supply of applications for handling human resources, accounts payable and receivable, accounting, reporting, etc. that allow for greater efficiency and effectiveness with a smaller workforce.**



**DANIEL FORTINBERRY, CAPP,** is parking division manager with the City of Cincinnati, Ohio. He can be reached at [daniel.fortinberry@cincinnati-oh.gov](mailto:daniel.fortinberry@cincinnati-oh.gov).