

Neighborhood Revitalization Commission
Statement on Parking in the City of La Crosse
Approved January 2017

The City of La Crosse enjoys the benefits of a successful and busy downtown that serves as a destination for the entire region, with bustling shops, attractive parks, varied restaurants and taverns, a heavily-used convention center, growing businesses, and popular events at theaters, arts centers and public spaces. Outside of downtown, other neighborhoods attract their own customers, residents and visitors: parks, shops, employers, restaurants and sporting venues in the Northside; hospitals, shops, schools, colleges and universities in the Southside; and churches, libraries, and pools throughout the city.

These attractions demonstrate the success of the city in supporting the growth of businesses, institutions, and cultural events, but the continued success of these uses is threatened by the need to temporarily store large numbers of personal automobiles in small spaces. Mostly, this need is subsidized at public expense, through the creation and management of surface parking lots, the construction and management of municipally-owned parking ramps, parking enforcement, and the use of on-street parking in residential neighborhoods. Publicly-subsidized parking is a considerable expense, both in actual budgetary expenditure and in the “opportunity cost” lost when valuable land or public street space is sacrificed to parking from other uses, either revenue-producing private ownership and development in the case of surface lots or ramps; or public use of streets for anything other than short-term and temporary storage of private property.

While the city is committed to supporting the needs of the public through the provision and management of automobile parking facilities, this cannot be the only approach to the problem, as the expense of subsidized parking damages the municipal budget and cannot in itself ever satisfy demand. In addition to a commitment to providing parking facilities, the Neighborhood Revitalization Commission supports the traffic demand management (TDM) approach to responding to the need for parking in the City of La Crosse. TDM aims to reduce traffic demand, or to more evenly distribute the demand over time so as to avoid congestion. Examples of TDM include traveller information systems; support for alternate modes of transportation including transit, walking, and biking; and dynamic market pricing for parking. Extensive research shows that non-market priced parking leads to congestion and demands for even more heavily-subsidized parking. “Free” parking results in a never-ending downward spiral that harms city finances and makes it harder to maintain the reason that people want to come to the neighborhoods as houses, shops, public spaces, and destinations are crowded out by even more parking facilities.

Parking needs are symptoms of larger decisions in transportation and land use planning, and the City of La Crosse has an existing “[Transportation Vision](#)” developed in 2015 that lays out both overall goals and specific actions related to parking that incorporate TDM principles.

The Streets and Highway Transportation Vision for the City of La Crosse is to plan, prioritize, and design changes that help the city to become a beautiful, livable, vibrant, historic, city between the rivers, bluffs and marsh that is the economic, educational, medical, social, cultural and transportation hub for the region. . . . the city envisions changing policies, practices, and physical design to its streets and highways, as well as the allied parking infrastructure within the city limits, . . . A key component of the city's vision is to reduce the overwhelming and unsustainable dependency on the single occupant vehicle as the primary mode of transportation and prioritize cycling, walking, public and private transit, telecommuting, land use changes, parking changes, and other supportive measures.

Specific parking actions in the Transportation Vision include:

- *encourage/require major employers and institutions to conduct transportation demand management (TDM) programs;*
- *reduce parking requirements for developments;*
- *start a residential street permit system;*
- *create transit oriented development (TOD) district; and*
- *have parking maximums in the TOD district.*

We, the people who live and work in the many neighborhoods of the City of La Crosse, support these approaches to responding to the demand for private automobile parking. We add to these ideas new approaches meant to reach the same goals, including neighborhood-specific parking benefit districts. Without these additional policies, publicly-subsidized parking facilities will continue to damage our neighborhoods.