
CITY OF SALEM
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
MEMORANDUM

TO: Tom Daniel, Economic Development Manager
FROM: Kevin Bruce, Intern DPCD
SUBJECT: Parking in Downtown Salem
DATE: August 20, 2008

Downtown Salem is a vibrant bustling city filled with history. The city attracts tourists from all around and provides a great commercial center for businessmen and women. Some people are able to utilize Salem's transit resources including the commuter rail, bus service and the Salem Ferry to Boston. However parking is an essential need for many others. There are a total of 2,673 public and 3,289 private parking spaces in downtown. Despite the abundant parking supply, there are real and perceived parking problems. This memo summarizes the parking resources, identifies parking problems and offers recommendations for improvements.

Parking Supply and Rate Summary

Throughout downtown Salem there are several options for either on-street or off-street public parking. These garages, lots or simply on-street spaces vary with use and cost. The largest public parking areas are Salem's two parking garages; one located in the heart of downtown, the other provides parking access to Salem's waterfront.

Museum Place parking garage and the South Harbor parking garage are the two largest off-street parking garages with a total of 914 and 249 spaces respectively. The daily rate for parking at the garages is \$1.50 per hour with a maximum charge of \$12.00 per day. As of July 17, 2008 a total of 550 annual and monthly passes were in use. These passes allow entry in and out of both garages. For non-pass holders, entry is free and payment is made at the end of the stay. After 8:00 PM the gate is no longer down and no payment is required (except during the month of October to increase revenue). Museum Place garage has a much higher demand than South Harbor garage; however, it is rare that either reaches capacity. Full capacity occurs on weekends in October, Halloween, and during snow emergencies (Museum Place also fills an average of three to four times during the summer months due to tourism). During October residents purchase an average of 30 to 40 more parking passes due to on-street parking congestion. Typically, there is very limited overnight parking at the garages (average of 130 cars at Museum Place and 40 at South Harbor per night).

Although Salem has two primary public parking garages, that does not limit off-street public parking to just those two locations. There are a total of nine other off-street public lots with a range of parking rates. The number of available spaces at the nine off-street lots is 1,042 spaces. The MBTA lot is the largest with 331 spaces. The lot serves as a park and ride station for both the commuter rail and the MBTA bus service. The adjacent Bridge Street lot and the MBTA lot have a flat rate of \$2.00 per day and are filled Monday through Friday. The Church Street lot charges \$1.50 per hour. The peak hour of usage at this lot is around 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM Monday through Thursday. During this time the Church Street lot exceeds capacity for about an hour and then spaces slowly begin to free up. The most crowded lots are near Federal Street due to the high number of city employees and state agencies located in that specific area. The least crowded lots are Riley Plaza West and Riley Plaza East. The remaining lots vary in utilization and range from 30 minute non-metered parking, to one-hour metered, to unlimited stay with no meters. The rate for all parking meters is \$0.25 per hour and handicap spaces are exempt.

Salem's on-street parking varies widely. Spaces range from 30 minute to two-hour time limited spaces. Some have no fee and others are metered. Meters are clearly marked with color-coded banners stating the specific amount of time allowed. The downtown parking meters are enforced Monday through Saturday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Legal holidays are exempt. Limited time spaces are also enforced Monday through Saturday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Throughout downtown, the most common space is two-hour metered. Of the total 459 on-street spaces 233 are two-hour metered spaces.

Throughout the downtown privately owned businesses and residential developments have their own private lots. The lots vary in size ranging from a mere eight spaces to the giant Shetland Park parking lots and garage. Shetland Park is a 1.5 million square foot office and industrial complex that employs approximately 2,000 people with over 2,000 private parking spaces. Next to the Salem Depot Commuter Rail Station is the Jefferson Apartments. This apartment complex has a total of 345 private parking spaces. The total number of private parking spaces excluding Shetland Park and Salem's Jefferson Apartments is 944 spaces. Including those two, the total reaches 3,289 spaces.

Parking Issues

Today, Salem has a parking problem. As noted above, during snow emergencies and peak tourism months the parking garages are full. In addition, on a regular basis, there is higher demand for parking specifically in the northern part of downtown, but other lots and garages have unused capacity. The Church, Crombie, Sewall and Salem Green lots are filled frequently while the Museum Place garage rarely ever fills. The lack of use of the garage despite its close proximity to the primary locations in downtown and the commuter rail station suggests that residents and commuters generally dislike the garage and prefer surface parking, due perhaps, to the appearance or the rate.

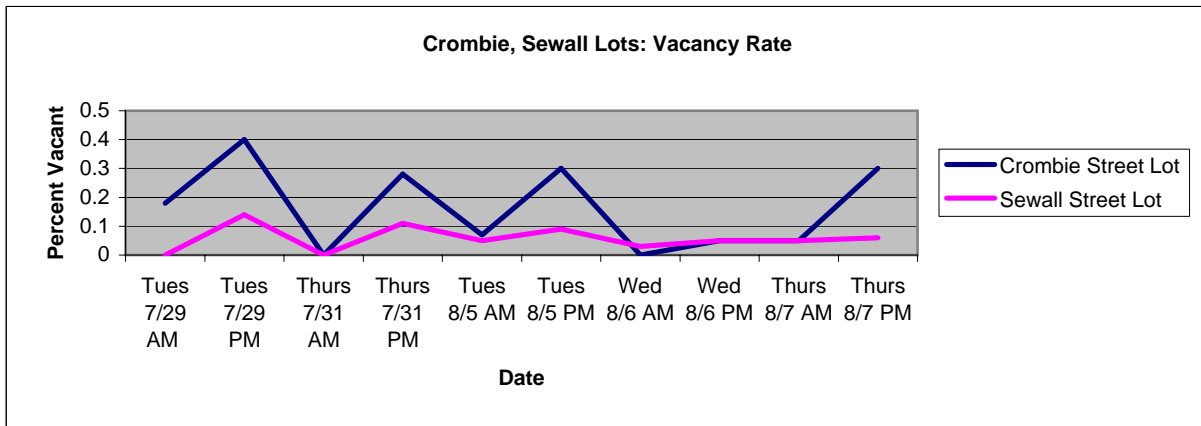
The Salem Depot Commuter Rail Station is among the busiest in the state. The MBTA and Bridge Street parking lots at the station are filled daily and spillover parking occurs on Bridge Street. Both lots are the cheapest in the city, charging a mere \$2.00 per day.

Recommendations

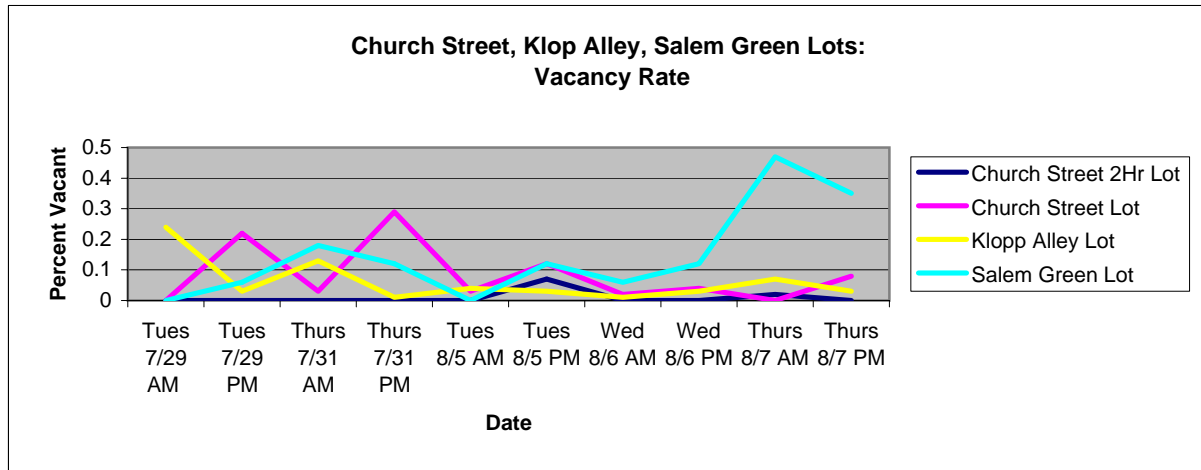
Incentives can be used to shift the parking flow out of the congested areas. Rate changes could possibly be made to draw people to the larger parking garages or existing lots. The Riley Plaza parking lots are 60% vacant at any given time while all other lots range from 0% to 20% vacant. The parking garages rarely fill and the space is there for commuters and residents. New rates could be made to attract commuter rail riders. For example, if the commuter provides his or her MBTA commuter rail ticket stub, the rate is a flat \$2.00 per day, alleviating the congestion at the MBTA and Bridge Street lots. The Museum Place garage is Salem's chance to solve part of the parking problem. Advertising for the garage could be placed at primary downtown locations. The rate for the garages is free after 8:00 PM; city establishments, primarily restaurants and bars, could advertise the availability of free parking to their customers.

Solutions to the capacity issues during snow emergencies and Halloween are beyond the scope of this memo. In addition, more information needs to be collected to analyze the utilization of the downtown parking lots and garages. For example, the number of residents using these lots, the number of employees commuting to the lots and specifically the percentage of transit users among the downtown residents and employees will help get a better understanding of where and what type the highest demand for parking is.

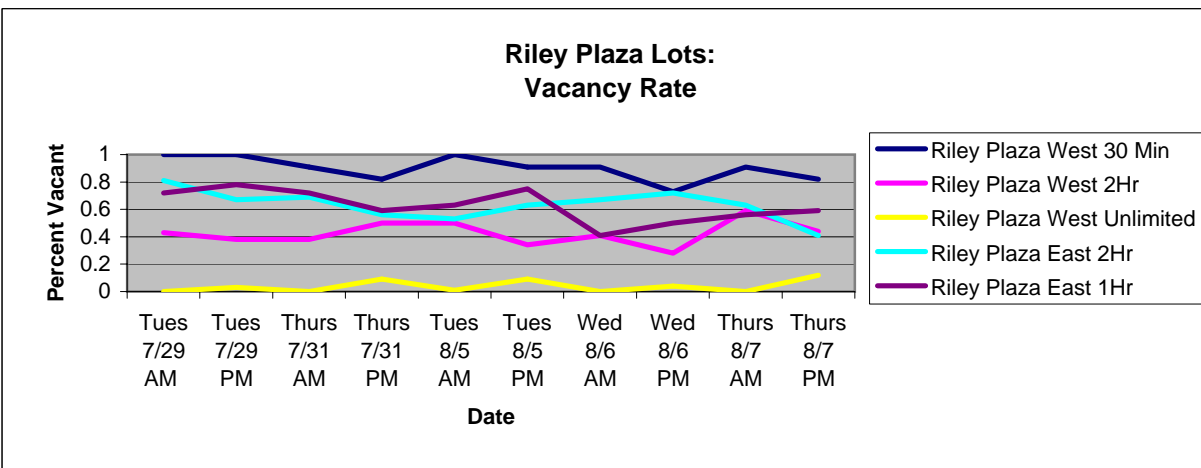
Salem Public Parking Lot Utilization Survey



Scale: 0% to 50%



Scale: 0% to 50%



Scale: 0% to 100%

Survey conducted July 29 to August 7, 2008. AM and PM data points are at 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM.