

20 Characteristics of Effective Parking Programs

Carl Walker, Inc.



Parking is one of the most visible, controversial and often underestimated elements of a downtown environment's infrastructure. A well-managed parking system is vital to attracting and supporting new development and is essential to sustaining healthy and vibrant downtowns.

The following twenty characteristics, when combined into an integrated, programmatic approach, provides the foundation for a sound and well-managed parking system that would be well on its way to becoming a "best-in-class" parking program.



- 1. Clear Vision and Mission.** Truly effective parking systems have a clear vision and well-defined mission. The development of a parking system's vision and mission statement should have one overriding goal: to see that the parking system's purpose and direction are tied to, and supportive of, the larger community's strategic development plan. Key questions might include: Are the parking system's financial responsibilities well-defined and understood? Is the parking system meeting its financial obligations and expectations? Does the parking system administrator provide educational support to community leaders about the importance of parking and the roles parking can and cannot play in meeting community objectives?
- 2. Parking Philosophy and Guiding Principles.** Effective parking programs have adopted a parking philosophy or set of philosophies to help guide and educate their staff and stakeholders. Does your parking system have a defined set of guiding principles? "Guiding principles" are not intended to replace policies and procedures, but define goals and objectives that ultimately define the character of the parking department. Guiding principles help the parking department know what is expected of it, along with a definition of its role and contributions.

Key Elements of Effective Parking Programs

- Mission Statement / Statement of Purpose
- Operations / Funding Strategies
- Strong Interdepartmental Relationships
- Responsibility for Parking Operations
- Rate Setting Guidelines
- Options for Allocating / Procuring Parking
- Inclusion of Parking in Strategic and Master Planning Processes
- Procedures for Managing Losses of Parking Supply
- Defining, Communicating Parking Rules & Regulations
- Enforcing Parking Rules and Regulations
- Defining Facility Maintenance Responsibilities
- Budgeting and Planning Cycles

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3. **Strong Planning.** Is parking planning information—parking inventory, quality maps, land use data, etc.—well developed, available and up-to-date? Are periodic parking supply-demand studies complete? Planning for the next parking developments should be “on the drawing board.” Parking should be represented and participate in other types of community studies such as downtown strategic plans, market studies, retail studies, transportation studies and more. Are strategically located potential parking development sites identified? Are future parking development sites “land banked”? Are potential sites assembled with adequate footprint size to develop an efficient parking structure? Parking lot and structure design guidelines should also be well-defined and developed.
4. **Community Involvement.** Effective parking systems solicit public input from a variety of sources, including the promotion of public forums and the use of parking task force groups. Does the parking system have close working relationships with other community groups such as Economic Development agencies, Urban Renewal agencies and downtown business associations? Does parking co-sponsor or share in downtown marketing and promotional initiatives?
5. **Organizational Effectiveness.** Whether a city department, a quasi-independent parking authority, an arm of an urban renewal agency or the responsibility of a downtown business association, a parking organization should be structured and staffed to best achieve its stated goals. Parking operations should ideally have a vertically integrated organizational structure. Consider your parking organization as a whole. Other organizational questions might include: Is parking to be managed in-house or should certain functions be outsourced? Does the parking system have a strong leader at the helm? Does the current organization/staffing plan provide the right mix of skills, talents and abilities? Staffing must be as efficient as possible and tools must be in place to evaluate staffing adequacy.
6. **Active Staff Development.** What training opportunities are in place for parking staff? Is the parking administrator CAPP/CPFM certified? Participation in local, state, regional and national parking associations is important to create networking and peer-to-peer communications. Operational “peer reviews” is a low cost initiative that can be set up through the local, regional or national parking association.
7. **Awareness of the Competitive Environment.** Consider the competition in your community. Are you ahead of, or behind, the curve? What is the potential impact to your operation if competition increases? A defined and formalized process for evaluation of parking market rates is also important. Regular parking rate surveys help maintain awareness of the competitive environment.



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8. **Strong Communication.** Effective parking operations have well-defined relationships between various departments, especially other support departments such as maintenance, security, communications, facilities management and planning. In municipal environments, effective communications with downtown business associations, economic development agencies, transit agencies and citizens groups are critical.
9. **Consolidated Parking System.** Taking a systems approach to parking is an important dimension to creating a comprehensive and effective parking program. Having control of all or most aspects of parking can contribute to a more effective operation because of the interactive nature of parking as a system. For example, having control of off-street but not on-street parking can lead to problems if parking rates are not kept in the proper balance or relationship. Ideally, the parking system should control off-street, on-street and parking enforcement operations.
10. **Strong Financial Planning and Management.** The parking system's financial expectations must be well-defined and understood. Is the system a self-supporting entity? A profit/revenue center? A support service sustained by other primary revenue sources? Use of parking revenues should be aligned with the vision and mission of the parking system. Having a consolidated parking financial statement that tracks all sources of parking revenues and expenses is critical. Investigate other possible sources of parking revenues such as tax increment financing, in-lieu-of parking fees, and special parking assessment districts. Annual operating statements should be published in an annual report and available for public review. Parking operations and financial audits are recommended annually.
11. **Creative, Flexible and Accountable Parking Management.** Take into account the needs of visitor and customer parking, employee parking, tourists, residential-shared parking support, competition with suburban locations, stimulation of downtown vitality, and intermodal connectivity. Your parking system should understand the fundamentals of parking management such as daily operations, policies and procedures, staffing and supervision, revenue control systems and parking and access control equipment, facilities maintenance, facilities marketing, security, customer service, signage and wayfinding. An annual parking report should be generated to identify key departmental issues and challenges, promote departmental achievements, document the "state of parking" to the administration, build confidence in the department and create a historical record.
12. **Operational Efficiency.** Is some form of benchmarking or comparative analysis in place to measure costs and performance to similar operations? Examples of best practices in efficiency include facility lighting (exterior bay and rooftop lights on separate circuit/photo-cell to save electricity) or the use of auto cashier units for after hours fee collection when cashiers are not cost effective.



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13. **Asset Protection and Facilities Maintenance.** Areas that are often overlooked or undefined are system/data back-up procedures, emergency preparedness and disaster preparation. It is also essential to have well-defined and comprehensive facility maintenance plans. Adequate maintenance reserve funds should be set aside based on prioritized facility maintenance action plans and regularly scheduled facility condition appraisals.

14. **Effective Use of Technology.** The most effective parking operations almost always have a comprehensive and integrated parking access and revenue control system that offers consistent operations and features for customers, simplified/consistent training for staff and auditors, and consolidated system-wide reporting and management information. New parking technologies can help improve your overall



program efficiency and effectiveness by helping you and your staff work smarter, not harder. It can improve parking revenues, reduce operating expenses, improve management controls and develop seamless and customer-friendly payment system options.

15. **Positive Parking Marketing.** Develop a positive and consistent parking system brand. The brand should promote the image you want people to have of the system and reinforce the positive aspects of the system such as convenient and easy parking, the benefits of visiting downtown and more. Use consistent signage to tie the system together. Have a parking tie-in to all downtown promotional materials. Actively promote and celebrate departmental contributions and achievements and expand and enhance parking websites.

16. **Quality Customer Service Programs.** Focus on employee training and hiring friendly, attentive, knowledgeable attendants. Increase personal contact between the parking system manager, stakeholders and customers. Institute performance measurements and utilize company and employee incentives. Create and implement a parking services program such as battery jumps, lock-outs, flat tires, escorts and a “parking hotline.” Improve the parking system’s website and links and use the monthly billing system for information and promotions. Develop a “New Employee Parking Brochure/Information Packet” and measure program effectiveness through customer surveys. Implement a “Secret Shopper Program” to evaluate customer service and provide customer feedback opportunities on a regular basis.

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17. **Special Events Parking Management.** Create a well-defined system for coordination of special events, focusing on cooperative interactions with the community. Provide incentives and special services such as coordination services, parking validations, and waiving of parking enforcement for those who participate in the special event planning process. Provide those that participate a high level of service, and disincentives for those that do not plan ahead.
18. **Effective and Consistent Parking Enforcement.** The key to an effective parking enforcement program is attitude, consistency and fairness. Best-in-class operations have adopted the philosophy of being customer-focused, not revenue- or violator-focused. Define who is responsible for day-to-day parking enforcement. Have a central number that everyone knows to call for information. Insure that parking rules, regulations and consequences are clearly posted and insure that if towing or booting occurs, that the number to call for towed/booted vehicles is clearly posted.
19. **Parking and Transportation Demand Management.** Demand management options should be considered as well as parking supply additions. Successful parking systems evaluate options to reduce parking demand, integrate transportation demand management strategies into their parking program philosophy, use parking rates as a tool to promote desired behaviors, integrate bicycle racks and storage lockers in parking facilities, show transit stops on parking maps, and promote park and ride options on their parking website.
20. **Safety, Security and Risk Management.** Consistent, well-lit facilities that meet or exceed IES minimums are essential for the safety and security of your patrons. Successful parking systems integrate parking attendants, cleaning and maintenance staff, and shuttle drivers into their parking security program. Incorporate safety and risk management issues into a weekly facility walk-through checklist.



Let **Carl Walker, Inc.** help you realize the ultimate parking system goals of a healthy, financially sound parking system—one that fosters positive attitudes from the public, positively impacts area businesses and other public entities, and a parking operation that “raises the bar” by exceeding customer expectations. Call us today at 1-800-FYI-PARK or visit www.carlwalker.com!