A special work session of the Beaufort City Council was held on June 11, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in council chambers, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Mayor Billy Keyserling and council members Stephen Murray, Phil Cromer, Mike McFee, and City Manager Bill Prokop. Councilman George O'Kelley was absent.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

Mayor Keyserling called the meeting to order at 6:05. He explained that the meeting was for a presentation by the parking task force.

**David Cargile**, Parking Task Force chairman, explained the challenge that the task force was given and said their mission was to identify and analyze all of the issues based on solid, empirical information. The task force has "expended thousands of hours meeting with stakeholders, reading documents, etc."

He detailed the methodology used. The task force's initial meeting was on February 16. Four subcommittees sought to determine if there was a problem and if so, what was causing them. The issues were then classified in terms of their impact on parking. The task force was divided into two groups: short- to mid-term issues and the strategic group. All task force members were assigned to one of those two groups. They had many analytical issues with the goal of pragmatic and feasible solutions, Mr. Cargile said. When critical analysis indicated that a solution was invalid, they moved on. There was cross-participation among the groups. The survey group was to obtain objective information "from all stakeholders." The past parking studies were reviewed: 1998, 2007, 2010, and 2012, and two from 2014. Mr. Cargile said the task force also obtained and analyzed parking data from Greenville, SC, Athens, GA, Manitou, CO, and Davidson, NC and others cities, and, when available, their follow-up studies. They also obtained other information from Charleston, Savannah, Wilmington, St. Augustine, Fernandina Beach, and Summerville, SC through travelling to the locations and through social media. They surveyed stakeholders in Beaufort and surrounding communities, visitors, and business owners, as well as receiving advice from Main Street, the Chamber of Commerce, SP+, and staff: **Linda Roper, Kathy Todd, Libby Anderson,** and **Bill Prokop**.

Mr. Cargile said they have lacked a proactive vision of parking's role in Beaufort's economic future in the past, which has been the main problem. Rather than through infill development, the increased sales tax revenues that "a positive parking experience would generate" could raise revenue, he said. There's greater demand for parking, which is a diminishing resource, and Beaufort has lost parking at "an alarming rate." Over and above all of their other recommendations, they recommend that section 7.5 of the UDO be modified to require parking on all downtown infill development. In addition, any exception to the current requirements should cease until that UDO modification is accomplished because

"continuing to create additional demand on this diminishing resource . . . will create a parking crisis in the near future," Mr. Cargile said.

**Highlights of task force recommendations:**

1. Formalize city management and control of parking with stakeholders' participation
2. Acquire additional parking capacity immediately and move forward with plans for a parking structure
3. Provide secure parking for downtown employees to prevent their "gaming" premium parking spaces
4. Do not extend the two-hour free parking trial past its June 30 deadline.
5. Finalize and execute a plan for directional parking signs

**Nan Sutton**, co-chair of the survey group, said council had been given the entire survey in its packets. The responses to two questions – numbers 14 and 15 – were 29 pages apiece, and she encouraged council to read all of that information, because, she said, it is relevant to why people do and don't come to downtown Beaufort.

A default survey size is 400, and they surveyed 1247, Ms. Sutton said. Some of the information the surveys provided:

1. How important are the following issues in regard to downtown Beaufort? The top issue was ample parking.
2. Respondents said they don't come downtown more often because of inconvenient parking.
3. The most inconvenient thing about parking downtown was that there is "never an available space," according to 300 respondents. 198 felt parallel parking is too hard; 203 said it *wasn't* inconvenient.
4. 1059 respondents (88%) said yes, they saw value in free parking two blocks away from Bay Street.
5. Nearly 60% said they would park in a less expensive lot off of Bay Street if it were available.
6. How far are you willing to walk to your destination downtown? 51% said they would walk two blocks, and 36.44% said three or more blocks.
7. Which is more important: the cost of parking or ease of finding a space? The majority – 64% – said finding a spot was most important.
8. What is reasonable per hour to pay to park downtown? $1 per hour was the amount, Ms. Sutton said, according to the vast majority, though about 10% thought amounts between $1.25 and $2 an hour were fair as well.
9. In regard to improving downtown parking issues, survey respondents were asked how important the cost of fines, low-cost parking, parking structure, a shuttle service, etc. were, and they were all about even.
10. Would you be willing to use a shuttle service from several blocks away to park at a reduced rate? Ms. Sutton said the answer to this was "a resounding no." 614 said no, 176 said yes, and 377 said maybe.

11. What is the average duration of your visits downtown? 622 people (53%) said two hours, and 258 people said three hours. SP+ has learned during the free parking experiment that two hours and 14 minutes is the average time people park downtown.

Ms. Sutton said the survey sample was derived from mailing lists from Main Street Beaufort, Mayor Keyserling, Dataw and Fripp communities, and the Chamber of Commerce, and it was put on the web via the downtown parking page, Eat Sleep Play Beaufort, and other sites. 896 of those surveyed gave their zip codes, Ms. Sutton said, while 351 skipped it. She had asked Survey Monkey why, and they said it's because people are so wary of their privacy now; "they want no one to know where they are." In the demographics, the gender of the majority of respondents was female at 766. The biggest age group was 65 and older (40.54%), and the next biggest was 46 to 65 (37%). The majority of respondents (about 45%) had annual incomes of $100,000 or more, Ms. Sutton said.

**Pete Palmer**, head of the task force's tactical committee, said the problem as they see it is the shrinking number of parking spaces by a third, because the city has allowed development to occur that doesn't allow for parking. All subsequent development needs to have parking capabilities built into it, he said.

In regard to the free parking experiment, Mr. Palmer said he liked it "a lot." He was "completely committed" to free parking before serving on the task force; everyone surveyed said that they liked it. However, "it's administratively impossible to deal with": the city is $62,000 in the hole as a direct result, he said. The committee "strongly recommend(s) that the experiment be allowed to lapse" at the end of June as planned.

Mr. Palmer said that prior to work on the task force, he had disbelieved that employees were parking on Bay Street and depriving customers of the ability to park. He had thought they could solve the parking problem by making Bay Street one-way. But "free parking is anarchy," he learned: "People park where they want to," and "it can't be managed." The city must employ a system of paid parking, with premium spaces being more costly and those further out from Bay Street less expensive.

- Mr. Palmer said they are also recommending three-hour limits on parking, not two, and keeping eight-hour limits "on spaces removed from Bay Street," except for in the library and the playground lots, which need turnover.
- A good argument can be made for rates of $2 an hour, but they are recommending $1 an hour in prime areas and $.50 an hour elsewhere.
- 11 am – 7 pm should be the paid parking hours.
- In regard to employees and business owners parking in premium spaces, Mr. Palmer said, "It's fact." They have counted employees parking and watched them move their cars "after 1 hour and 58 minutes" to another spot. This is

not unusual, he said. "People do this everywhere." They "game the system" and will continue to do so unless there is "proximate, inexpensive and secure parking elsewhere."

- The city needs to reconfigure marina parking, but also improve lighting for security. Also, patrols by police "would be greatly appreciated." They heard this a lot, Mr. Palmer said, especially after dark and around restaurants.
- Large buses in the marina can be better managed. They should stage elsewhere, not remain in the lot. Tour vans should have reserved spots. Carriages should remain in the marina.
- If the city were to acquire the former Bank of America lot, they could gain 80 spaces. Ideally, in both lots, "some spots should be allocated for employees so that they have someplace to go," and maybe they could be charged less than they are now. They "need both the carrot and the stick," Mr. Palmer said: proximate, secure parking *and* strict enforcement.
- Some transit system may be needed for those parking further out – for employees and tourists.
- In regard to parking signage, "We don't have any to help a visitor or tourist find a place to park, and (give) no hint of where people can park all day." There needs to be a focus on those coming in from out of town. A Wilmington, NC visitors' brochure, Mr. Palmer showed, indicates where to park and for how long and something like it should be placed "everywhere for tourists to use." The pamphlet "would be very easy to Beaufort-ize," he said.
- The key is "Education, education, education!" Mr. Palmer said. "It's a big deal." The city needs to educate the population as to what the money they spend on parking is going into, so they know it goes back into downtown Beaufort and not into the General Fund.
- Tokens – The survey of businesses made it clear that only a ¼ of the businesses use them, but those who do say customers really like them.
- Fines – No one wants them, and no one wants getting a ticket to be the last thing tourists experience. Mr. Palmer said the committee recommends warning notices for first-time offenders and "obvious out of towners." The price of the $10 fine should be maintained.

There's a summary of their recommendations in the packet, Mr. Palmer said.

**Tony Royal**, of the strategic group, said they had worked on longer-term recommendations.

- Formalize city management and control of parking with a parking liaison – which is now Ms. Roper – who is to assess uses and needs and be on the parking structure development committee.
- An infrastructure-based development team should be found through an RFQ, Mr. Royal said, and he listed the qualifications that they should have to develop a parking structure downtown. It should hold at least 500 vehicles. The city should issue the RFQ within 60 days, given the limited area available

for such a structure. Upon issuing the RFQ, they should select a committee that would then select a team that would do this within three years.

- Establish a parking committee to advise on parking made up of 5–7 downtown stakeholders and owners, so they have a voice in parking management.
- Expand and acquire additional flat lots – Mr. Royal showed a chart of the last 17 years of the parking inventory in downtown Beaufort. The numbers of both private and city-owned parking spaces have decreased considerably. Street spaces have remained flat, and over time, they have lost 150 spaces in "a slow earthquake." This group also recommended that the city should secure the former Bank of America lot, and he showed a concept drawing to give an idea of the number of spaces that could be created. If 50% could be allocated to downtown employees, "that would do a lot for them."
- Continue to work with the Santa Elena Foundation and the county on the existing lots at the federal courthouse building.
- The city must discuss with the parking committee and the city manager before selling any properties that might be used for parking or staging.
- Mr. Royal showed where a parking structure might go on Port Republic Street.
- Long term, Mr. Royal said, there's a need to establish a regional transit system for visitors, residents, and employees. This would ease traffic congestion and diffuse demand on downtown parking resources. It would need to go beyond the existing downtown core. The city should cooperate with Port Royal, as well as downtown Beaufort, Penn Center, the Parris Island museum, the port of Port Royal, TCL, Beaufort Memorial Hospital, Beaufort Town Center, USCB, and other employment centers and areas of interest.
- In regard to the UDO modification Mr. Cargile had mentioned, the need for it is highlighted at Old Bull Tavern, where "the building has displaced 12 spaces," which is part of the "slow earthquake" in parking diminishment.

Mr. Royal said Ms. Todd had given them a 5-year history of the revenues in the City of Beaufort and the downtown core. Certain taxes have increased 40–45% while downtown merchant revenues have only increased 14%. Downtown is not keeping up with the rest of the city in terms of growth in taxes and revenues.

Councilman Cromer said this "opens up your eyes"; he had been a free parking proponent as well, he said. Mr. Cargile said the task force members "went in with no preconceived notions," and, he admitted, he "learned a lot," even reading a 600-page book on parking.

Councilman Murray said he had no questions yet but thanked the committee, as Councilman Cromer had, for volunteering and for their hard work. It's council's turn to look at their recommendations and do some work, he said.

Councilman McFee offered "kudos" to the task force and said council will "pore over . . . the immense amount of data." They had brought council "a lot of good information" and have given them a lot to think about.

Mayor Keyserling said the task force's work was "as good as (he) had anticipated" or "maybe a little better." He has some questions, but they might be answered in the report. He suggested council do a work session to "dig a little deeper" and should be prepared at that time with questions. Should the parking committee be a standing board? Should transportation be a private or public sector project? Mayor Keyserling said he sees a lot more questions and answers forthcoming. He asked council how they should do a work session: should the two groups come to council separately or should council "look at it all at one time" with all the committee chairs? Councilman Cromer suggested that they "split it up." Mayor Keyserling said there might be two to four work sessions, so they should determine who's going to be there for those. They should schedule a work session on a non-council night and have at least Mr. Cargile and the two co-chairs of each of the subgroups and Ms. Sutton "on the data side."

Councilman Murray asked Mr. Royal about downtown businesses not keeping pace with the rest of the city. Early on in this process, merchants had said that they needed support, and that parking was negatively affecting their sales. He said the Chamber of Commerce was going to collect revenue data from businesses and was to determine if the effect of parking was positive or negative. Mr. Royal said the numbers in the package provided by the city's finance department, which show the revenues and sales, indicate the growth downtown is up 14% in the last 5 years, while other areas of the city have had 40–45% growth. The downtown and core commercial district "can't really grow much more"; there was "an expectation that free parking would help sales," but "many merchants had poor performing months" during the experiment, compared with the prior year. "Some businesses reported some of their worst months in the last several years," which is an indication that sales might be more subject to the economy than they are to parking, "because nationally, sales weren't good." Mr. Palmer said, anecdotally, more locals were said to be coming in the stores, though it didn't make much difference: how could it, he asked, when employees were taking up the prime parking spaces? Mr. Cargile said they had gotten the Chamber of Commerce reports, but they "couldn't find a pattern in the data," only that "some months were better than others." There were so few of these reports, though, that it made gleaning data from them more difficult. "So many other factors came into play," **Kevin Cuppia** said, so "you couldn't say that sales went up or down" due to free parking.

Mayor Keyserling said he had been at the mayor's design institute and eight consultants were among the participants there, including **Hideo Sasaki**, who had remodeled Waterfront Park. "We had the prettiest city," Mayor Keyserling said everyone at the institute had said, and they would all come here to visit. The question he'd posed was how to redefine downtown as more than three blocks. All

the planning is Bay to Boundary Street, and Craven to Carteret. The takeaway was (1) Success downtown would involve getting more people living in that area. "Without a more diverse retail offering," though, it will "only be more tourists." (2) Those people who will buy those houses "demographically will be bikers and walkers," so they need to grow the downtown between Craven and Boundary Street, and better utilize Bladen, Charles and Carteret Streets, also. The answer can be as simple as riding the wave of the current demographic trends of people who would like to live downtown.

Mr. Palmer said active use of the Bank of America lot for staging and parking could help grow that part of Carteret and Port Republic Streets. Mayor Keyserling agreed that the focus couldn't just be on Bay Street. They "might satisfy some of the Sunday church parking"; Mayor Keyserling said he knows of a new business that is going on Carteret Street and another that would like to but is concerned about lack of parking.

**Ginger Aimar** said infilling Beaufort is "great for revenues," but people who live on Boundary Street won't walk to Bay Street to shop. A lot of people on the survey are only willing to walk two blocks or less: "We definitely need to look into a parking garage." Ms. Aimar said council should take these recommendations "extremely seriously to make parking available for growth." People can't bike from Lady's Island or the air station, and if there are to be businesses downtown, parking needs to be provided for those who work there.

Mayor Keyserling said that when the county asked the City of Beaufort for recommendations for the capital sales tax, they asked for money for the parking garage and to open up the Waterfront Park for more recreation. Raising $16 million for a parking garage is a challenge, and it has to done by increasing revenues.

Mr. Cargile said anything they recommended "has all been drilled down," and though they hadn't done the research on how to do it, "$16 million is not a number you should think about." They "had to get into the whole vision of the future," he said. He likes the picture of people downtown walking and bicycling, but "that is not going to happen in our lifetime." Among the 60,000 people who come downtown, those who walk and bike will not produce enough revenue to support the economy there.

This task force was "run very professionally and very business-like," Mr. Cargile said, but "the major difference in this" and paying consultants was that the committee members love and are concerned about Beaufort, so, he said, "Please don't waste it." Mayor Keyserling said there's nothing in the study from a cursory look that he disagrees with, but there will be a lot of details to work out.

**Peter White**, Southurn Rose buggy tours, asked the reasoning behind changing the hours to 11 am – 7 pm. Mr. Cargile said it's because of the gaming of the system,

predominantly by restaurant employees. Changing these hours will help manage parking, so employees won't be as easily "able to take premium parking for two hours and carry over."

**Evelene Stevenson** asked where they would stage the large buses so they could sit after drop off. Mr. Cargile said they had thought, when they walked the area, that they have more than one option. Several options will take a little more city work. The bus driver is sometimes part of the tour, Mr. Cargile said, so one of their recommendations is to use the city-owned lot at the federal courthouse, which has some proximity. Committee members had talked to Peter and **Rose White** about a golf cart for drivers who needed to be part of their tours.

**Paul Michau** asked how much they had talked to business owners about stopping their employees from parking in the premium spaces. He said the solutions they've discussed would "lead to employees parking in the residential areas." He asked if they had talked to businesses about where their employees parked, and what they could afford to pay to park. Mr. Cargile said they had met with all of the downtown employees and had given surveys to them and to the business owners. The employees were "very open about how they game the system," Mr. Cargile said, by moving their cars. The task force "got a lot of information" from them. There are industry standards on the most effective ways to manage parking. The employers who hire these people and pay them need the two-hour turnover, because the economic value of a two-hour space is $37.50 per hour to an employer, Mr. Cargile said, "so there's a real incentive to get their employees" out of the premium parking spaces.

The issue with the employers is larger than just telling their employees not to do it anymore, Mr. Cargile said. The employers are concerned about the liability of telling an employee that they have to park remotely, when that employee could be assaulted or robbed at night, and the employer would then be liable. If secure, reasonable parking is supplied to employees, then they can say, "Don't park on Bay Street, and you have a safe, reasonable-to-walk-to space." Mr. Cargile described where 40–50 spaces could be picked up in two locations downtown. They also know there are issues of people parking in the residential areas, and "providing a secure place to park will provide relief there, too." Enforcement from both SP+ and the employers is really important; some employers said they would tell their employees that if they were caught parking on Bay Street more than once or twice, they would be fired. Mr. Michau said again that he fears the employees will "spread into the surrounding neighborhoods" to park if they can't park on Bay Street.

**Susan Sauer**, Discovery Tours, asked what the next step was in regard to the large buses because she "didn't have any chance to talk to anyone about it." Mr. Cargile said these were the task force's recommendations, and "it won't be a done deal" until council makes *its* recommendations. Ms. Sauer said this matter "had fallen through the cracks of communication." She had only found out two weeks ago from

**Robb Wells** about the issue of the large motor coaches being moved to a remote location. Mr. Palmer said that would be for staging, not for pick up and drop off. Instead of parking buses that wait for two or three hours and occupy spaces, "they can park elsewhere." Ms. Sauer said they are only here in the spring and fall for a few weeks. She doesn't "understand why the buses can't stay where they have been." Mr. Cargile said that every one of the tour operators had been invited to the meetings, and she may have fallen off the email list.

**Charlie Calvert** is a tourism professor, and said Bridges Prep could bring in 400 families a day to the downtown area if they had a place to park. They would go to Bay Street and shop, but without places to park, they'll go elsewhere. More flat parking would be helpful. The tourism wave is about to hit, he added, and things will get better.

**Josefina Blanc**, interim executive director at Bridges, reiterated what Mr. Calvert had said and added that those 400 families will be 1000 when the full high school is built out. She hopes that "flat parking doesn't cancel out those who bike and walk." She added that Bridges would love to be a part of the parking committee.

**Paul Thompson**, the owner of Panini's, said, in regard to employees gaming the system, "a lot of my preconceived notions were changed." He asked about enforcement: "a lot of uncollected fines are out there." There need to be tickets given by police that can be enforced, he feels. Mr. Thompson asked if they had looked at enforcement options for employees. Mr. Cargile said they had looked at booting for people who had received several tickets. If there were a consequence like that, Mr. Thompson said, it "would go on the grapevine" that "there is enforcement with teeth." Mr. Cargile said that the committee had recommended a kinder and gentler approach to start with.

**Rose White** asked how they planned to make people feel safe walking after dark back to where they were parked. They will create more spaces in the Marina parking lot, she said, but how will they make people feel safer? "There used to be bike cops everywhere," she pointed out, and at one point, there were even firemen downtown for security. Mr. Palmer said they were very sensitive to the issue of security, especially if they won't let employees who get off work at 12 am – 2 am park on Bay Street. A lot of restaurants encourage their people to walk in groups when they leave at night, he said. One way to improve safety is with "illumination . . . it's poor now," and an invitation for criminals. "Virtually everyone" they spoke with, including all downtown employers, told committee members that they wished that they could see more police, Mr. Palmer said. They can ask for more patrolling, but "there is only so much stretching" that can be done. Close circuit TV cameras can be put up, and other measures can be taken to dissuade criminals.

Mr. Cargile said the need for a transit system was also recognized – such as electric vehicles to transport employees from another lot to Bay Street. For something like

that, they might be able to get a federal grant. Over and above that, the Santa Elena Foundation is predicting 250,000 visitors a year, Mr. Cargile said, and even if it's *only* 100,000, they will be at the federal courthouse and come downtown, so "we need to deal with that."

**Alice Washington** said, in regard to locals vs. visitors: she doesn't shop downtown because the stores don't have what she wants. She thinks locals will shop and spend money if it meets their needs. She walks downtown to Waterfront Park but doesn't shop or eat downtown. There needs to be a balance between what is done for tourists and locals. Mr. Cargile said their mandate was parking. Ms. Washington said she was pointing out why she didn't want to drive and park downtown.

"**Carol**" (no last name given) said that the people who come to Beaufort on the bus tours come back to visit again, and that should be considered when they determine how the buses are staged. Whatever is done with them needs to be in coordination with the tour companies when they're here: "They're already short on time," so there shouldn't be "arbitrary" decisions made about where the buses go.

**Peggy Simmer**, 915 Port Republic Street, said Washington, DC is a big walking city, and she explained how the buses work there. She offered parking in satellite areas at airports as an example of how employee parking can be handled.

Mr. Cargile said he thinks the recommendations on directional signs will have a big impact, too. He described a traffic jam that he'd seen on Bay Street made up almost entirely of tourists "when there were 80 parking spaces elsewhere," but the tourists didn't know where those other spaces were. Signs "will have a major impact on everyone."

**Lynda Bransford**, who owns Reflections, 928 Bay Street, said last year, she had encountered tourists who "were so angry about getting (parking) tickets." That was a bad experience for them, and they might not come back to Beaufort because of it, so she likes the idea of giving warnings to them and to first-time parking offenders.

Mr. White said his experience with tourists on the waterfront is that when people get tickets, a lot of times "it's about a lack of information or not understanding how the system works."

Mr. Cargile said this parking report is not yet online, but Ms. Roper had said it would be soon.

Mayor Keyserling said council would have its first work session with the task force on June 30 at 5 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.