



June 2015

## **Frequently Asked Questions: Parking in Downtown Beaufort SC**

### **1. What is the Parking Task Force?**

The Parking Task Force was created by the Beaufort City Council to address several of the parking issues that have been debated, discussed and reviewed over the past several years. City Council recruited approximately 20 community members to serve of the Task Force who were than appointed by the Chair of the Task Force, David Cargile. City Council required the Task Force to present findings and recommendations in June 2015.

### **2. Why was it created and what was its charge or purpose?**

At the Dec. 23, 2014 Beaufort City Council meeting, Council approved a resolution establishing the Task Force with the following charge:

“City Council will create a blue ribbon task force charged with exploring and evaluating additional and/or alternative options for managing parking to include fees, graduated fines, additional on-street parking opportunities, reconfiguration of existing spaces to create more parking and other options including long-term concerns to include moving some parking from the Waterfront Park parking lot to make room for more green recreational space and a parking garage. The task force will issue a report no later than the middle of March though it may be extended to address longer term issues if necessary.”

### **3. Why has parking been a hot-button issue in Beaufort – is this common in small towns?**

Parking is a common discussion point in most towns nationally. It is a question of cost and location – how much are people willing to pay to park for the convenience of parking close to where they intend to shop? The issue is magnified when the downtown shopping area is fairly limited in size and where there is a small number of premium on-street parking spaces. Larger cities have the advantage of more acreage in which to place off-street parking lots or even garages.

Additionally, Beaufort’s core commercial district downtown is located in the 303-acre National Historic Landmark District. This creates additional restrictions and development guidelines for any new construction, including parking lots and garages.

Further, since at least 1998 Beaufort has been losing parking capacity rather than adding to parking capacity. There are approximately 150 fewer spaces today than existed in 1998. This is due to loss of

both public and private parking spaces. One issue is the Unified Development Ordinance that has allowed infill development without requiring parking.

**4. How many parking spaces are located in the core commercial / downtown area?**

There are 441 public parking spaces in the core commercial district, and a total of 916 including those on private property that typically aren't available for daily public use.

**5. Are the current parking spaces always filled? Or do we need more, and if so, where?**

Research by the Beaufort Parking Task Force indicates that during peak hours, typically around lunch time, there may be zero to 2 available parking spaces along Bay Street – the downtown core shopping district -- at any given moment. An ideal turnover ratio for any city is 15 percent. This means there would be 8-10 open spaces on Bay Street at any given time.

This would allow visitors to find parking quickly and efficiently without having to circle the block and would provide the turnover for the shop owners that allow them to succeed and continue to provide jobs. Many of the downtown parking spaces are blocks from the downtown core shopping district on Bay Street and are under-used. The lack of a public transit system keeps people from parking in remote lots and taking a shuttle “downtown,” and also forces people to drive their vehicles downtown.

**6. What did the recent survey show were primary reasons people didn't shop downtown?**

More than 65 percent of people responding to the Parking Task Force survey said the main reason they didn't shop downtown was difficulty in finding a parking space. The price of parking was a distant second. Other reasons given for not shopping downtown included inconvenient store hours and the lack of stores, products and variety of shopping.

**7. What were the results of the six months of free two-hour parking -- did merchants show increased sales?**

Due to a lack of merchant response to the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce's monthly survey about this topic, it's impossible to determine whether there was a direct correlation between 2 hours of free parking an increased economic activity of business merchants.. The responses that were received didn't show a pattern – some months were up, some were down.

**8. How much does each parking space generate per hour in terms of economic impact to our downtown businesses?**

There is industry-wide research that the economic value of premium spaces is \$37.50 per hour. It is not possible to determine a specific figure for Beaufort. That means that each parking space along Bay Street and the cross streets generates, on average, \$37.50 in retail sales each hour. Over the course of a typical eight-hour work day, each of those parking spaces is “worth” \$300 in sales.

**9. How can we encourage and motivate downtown employees to park in off-street parking away from the crowded commercial area?**

The most often cited reason is the potential liability from forcing employees to use remote parking (particularly restaurant employees who finish work very late at night). Again, this is compounded by the lack of a transit system to carry employees from the downtown to remote parking lots, or to bring people from outside of downtown to the shopping and dining area without using their private vehicles.

It is a tricky balance to price prime on-street spaces to attract visitors to downtown Beaufort while enforcing time restrictions in those spaces to discourage employees from parking in those prime spaces. There is also a need for convenient off-street parking at a cost that is not prohibitive for industry-type workers.

## **10. Why not just offer free parking without the two-hour limit?**

This is not unique to Beaufort and is a common problem in all of the parking studies analyzed by the task force. A primary “downside” for downtown merchants is that parking spaces may be taken up all day by people not shopping downtown. The idea of free two-hour parking was to encourage people to visit downtown and enjoy shopping for two hours, after which they have the option of paying the regular meter rates.

The reality of free parking is that it rather than providing for parkers benefiting the downtown merchants, others park in those premium spaces without any economic benefit to the merchant. The Task Force found that employees of downtown businesses were ‘gaming’ over those premium spaces that are most desirable for customers.

The overall downside is related to the supply and demand curve: As prices go down, demand goes up. Remember the concept that the ideal balance is a 15 percent turnover in parking spaces downtown, meaning there should be roughly 8 to 10 empty spaces on Bay Street at any given time. During high demand hours it is currently more likely to be 0 to 2 available spaces. This also increases traffic congestion as people circle looking for parking close to their destination or forces them to the less-desirable long-term spots for what would be a shorter stay.

Across small communities, one of the largest contributors to a shortage of available ‘prime spaces’ with free parking is that employees use the premium spaces, creating a shortage of parking for customers. For every 50 people who are happy that they lucked out finding a great parking space, there are at least another 50 who are upset because they cannot find a space -- and the entire experience of visiting a beautiful downtown such as Beaufort is looked at negatively.

Also, industry standards show that a two-hour turnover of premium spaces is needed for the best economic value for the business owners.

Free two-hour parking on streets is cumbersome to enforce and often causes anxiety with visitors not knowing how much time they have left. Some employees are able to move their vehicles from space to space and continue to use the prime on-street spaces all day in free two-hour increments.

In addition, Beaufort provides that all parking revenues go to the Redevelopment Commission to be invested back into downtown. The majority of cities allocate their parking revenues to the general fund to be used for whatever the city decides. Through April the City of Beaufort was in the hole by \$65,000 from lost parking revenues. That translates into a direct loss of resources used for downtown maintenance and development.

## **11. Why does Beaufort need to “manage” parking? Can’t the police enforce parking?**

A parking management company is able to provide services more efficiently and economically than can be done by hiring city staff. Having the City take over parking management would involve additional personnel, training and benefits costs, plus there would be the capital outlay to purchase equipment that the parking company furnishes as part of its contracted services.

In the past, Beaufort Police officers checked the meters and wrote tickets. Now, with the budget constraints on the Police Department, they don't have the resources to provide parking management or meter maid services. Police resources are best utilized for other duties than writing parking tickets.

## **12. Why not build a parking garage?**

A multi-level parking garage in downtown Beaufort has been discussed for many years. Benefits include the ability to park a large number of vehicles on a small amount of land, the ability to “wrap” the parking decks with small retail or business offices so the entire structure blends in better to the surrounding neighborhood. To date, the primary challenge has been finding suitable funding methods to cover the cost to design and construct a multi-level garage.

Building a garage is not the easiest or quickest, but it is the most effective for the long-term economic value to the city.

## **13. What is next now that the Parking Task Force has concluded its presentation?**

The Beaufort City Council and staff will discuss the Task Force findings and recommendations at a work session June 30, 2015, at 5 p.m. in City Hall. Then, staff and Council will develop an action plan based on the Task Force's report.

The two-hour free parking test period will expire June 30, 2015, and all meters are being re-set to regular rates and time limits effective July 1, 2015.

*To read or download the complete Beaufort Parking Task Force's findings and recommendations, visit [www.cityofbeaufort.org](http://www.cityofbeaufort.org), go to Quick Links and click on Parking Information.*

**For more information about parking in downtown Beaufort, visit [www.parkbeaufort.com](http://www.parkbeaufort.com).**