

# Downtown Ponoka – Parking Management Plan

## Introduction and Purpose

The Parking Management Plan is a key part of implementing the vision and desired future direction for Downtown Ponoka. It addresses a key issue that can often become an impediment to the desire to create a compact, vibrant urban area containing many diverse activities and draws. With the dominant mode of transportation used by visitors to Ponoka and the Downtown area being the private automobile provision has to be made to store the vehicles and get visitors and customers walking.

The Parking Management Plan provides a policy framework that supports the concept of “right-sizing” the supply of public parking provided in the Downtown area with the goals of:

- Reducing the consumption of land for parking facilities;
- Promoting use of modes of travel other than the single-occupant vehicle; and
- Encouraging a more intense and attractive urban form.

The Plan is meant to guide future investments in parking facilities and operational considerations in the routine management of the existing inventory of public parking.

The Plan does not replace the requirements of the Town of Ponoka Land Use Bylaw regarding the number and design of parking stalls to be provided as private lands are developed. However, some of the recommended actions and strategies can be applied to privately owned inventories of parking.

When appropriately implemented, parking management can provide numerous benefits, including:

- *Improved Service Quality* – it can improve user experience by providing better information, increasing user options, reducing congestion and creating more attractive facilities;
- *Urban Form and Land Use Support* – it can help create more accessible and efficient land use patterns and support other strategic land use planning objectives such as compact development;
- *Support for More Modes of Travel* – it can promote walking, cycling and, carpooling, and where available, use of public transit; and
- *More Liveable Communities* – it can help create a more attractive urban environment.

The Plan emphasizes the concept of shared parking. This is the use of a parking space to serve two or more individual land uses. The ability to share parking is a result of variations in the time of day or time of week when parking accumulation occurs and the tendency for one user to visit multiple uses during

the same trip. The concept is not new to downtown planning as witnessed by shared on-street parking and investment in public parking lots.

## Relation to Other Downtown Goals and Plans

Parking in Downtown Ponoka needs to be considered in the context of the community’s overall goals and desires for Downtown. Parking is a part of the “support system” and not a goal in itself. Great downtowns address parking but do not surrender the majority of the surface land area to parking. While this Plan has been written as a standalone document it needs to be read and used in conjunction with the Downtown Action Plan and other implementing tools such as the Land Use Bylaw.

## Current Situation and Analysis

Both the Town of Ponoka Municipal Development Plan (2012) and the Retooling Downtown Ponoka Study (2007) identified the opportunity to moderate the overall requirement for new parking supply in the Downtown. This was based on the number of public and private parking stalls available in and around the existing commercial uses (see map in Appendix A). In 2016 a survey and estimate of public parking found that between the Town owned parking lots and available on street parking and large, privately owned surface parking lots there were a total of 1,200 parking stalls available. This does not account for private parking off rear lanes or informal parking areas like the gravel lots along the railway. Table 1 provides an estimate of the available supply of private and public parking stalls.

Table 1: Inventory of Parking Stalls

Type of Parking	Ownership	Number of Available Stalls
Surface Parking in Off-Street Lots	Town	239 (actual)
Surface Parking in Larger Off-Street Lots	Private (Various Owners)	429 (actual)
Surface Parking off Rear Lane	Private (Various Owners)	300 (estimated)
On Street Parking	Town	546 (actual)
Total Estimated Inventory		1,514

On December 14, 2016 a license plate survey was undertaken for the three Town owned parking lots closest to the commercial core centred on Chipman Avenue and the on-street parking on Chipman Avenue and on the west side of 50 Street. The findings support the general sense that over the course of a week day there is available capacity in the inventory of public parking spaces to accommodate parking generated by additional uses and development in the Downtown area. More detail about the survey is contained in Appendix B.

The current situation for public parking in Downtown Ponoka includes the following factors:

- Parking is not metered and there is no fee for use system in place for on-street parking or any private or public off-street parking areas;
- Very few time restrictions are in place with a one hour limit applying to two blocks on the west side of 50 Street and 30 minute limits in place in front of the RCMP station and the Post Office;
- There are few marked on-street handicap parking stalls;
- The majority of on-street parking is parallel parking with the only exception being one block of angled parking on the south side of Chipman Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street;
- With the exception of the angled parking on Chipman Avenue on-street parking stalls are not marked and the “no parking” areas near fire hydrants and intersections have painted yellow curb and regulatory signs indicating “no parking”;
- There is limited directional signage to guide drivers to the off-street public parking areas and no signage at the three main Town parking lots; and
- The Town does not have an active enforcement program devoted to parking in the Downtown area.

## **The Downtown Parking Challenge**

Providing adequate parking in the era of widespread use of private automobiles faces numerous challenges. They are not insurmountable. Some of the more common themes that arise when discussing parking availability in a downtown setting are briefly discussed below. These themes are not unique to Ponoka.

### *Perception of Parking Shortage*

An oft heard refrain is that there is nowhere to park downtown. The perception that there is a shortage of convenient parking downtown often is not based on the actual supply and use of parking but rather on a lack of awareness of its location. It can be reinforced through the absence of well-defined pedestrian connections between parking facilities and downtown destinations. Shoppers tend to sense that parking supply is inadequate and inconvenient unless they can find a space either in front of the store or in a surface parking lot in the store’s immediate vicinity.

Perceived inadequacies of downtown parking can be overcome by:

- Creating an identity for downtown as a multi-purpose destination and making this more readily apparent through marketing efforts;

- Making downtown compact with well-defined links between activities and a strong pedestrian orientation to support the sense of a one-stop activity centre (where multiple activities can be accomplished on foot from a single parking space – just like the suburban mall);
- Providing an easy-to-understand consistent system of directional signage, location maps, and similar wayfinding devices.

### Unwillingness to Walk

Ideal, acceptable walking distance from parking stall to destination is 400 feet in an outdoor environment. The distance a person is willing to walk depends on the nature of the trip (quick pick up of a single item versus out for an afternoon of shopping) and the quality of the walking environment (pleasant atmosphere, safe, etc.). Walking distance can be as far as 800-1,200 feet and still be considered acceptable if it is a pleasant experience.

### The Angled versus Parallel Parking Debate

The debate between the relative merits of angled on-street parking and parallel on-street parking can be lively. Two opposing views are presented below.

“ Parallel parking is preferred in an urban setting because it improves the appearance of the street and reduces traffic hazards associated with angled parking. ” Cy Paumier

“ Angled parking increases spending by more than 20% and increases the number of parking spaces by a third. Nobody likes parallel parking. ” Roger Brooks

The decision to provide parallel versus angled parking depends heavily on the amount of space available in the street right of way. Angled parking on both sides of a street, requires at least 82 feet of width without sacrificing all other amenities that contribute to a great street (sufficiently wide sidewalks, space for boulevard trees and benches, etc.). The majority of street rights of way in Downtown Ponoka are 65-66 feet wide. Providing angled parking on one side of the street, like Chipman Avenue, is an option; however, the benefits of additional parking supply are lost due to the absence of parking on the other side of the street. In addition, one direction of travel has to be given preference over the other.

Parallel parking is not a favorite choice of many drivers. Similarly, the hesitation that comes with backing out of an angled parking stall is not looked upon favourably.

## Plan Principles

The following general principles were used to prepare the Plan. They are intended to help guide future planning and operational decisions to support the overall aim of the parking management effort. In the absence of a set action or strategy, the plan principles should be applied to the situation to reach a decision.

<i>Principle 1</i>	<i>Consumer Choice</i>	People should have viable parking and travel options.
<i>Principle 2</i>	<i>User Information</i>	People should have clear information on their parking and travel options.
<i>Principle 3</i>	<i>Sharing</i>	Parking facilities should serve multiple users and destinations to the greatest extent possible.
<i>Principle 4</i>	<i>Efficient Utilization</i>	Parking facilities should be sized and managed so spaces are frequently occupied.
<i>Principle 5</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	Parking plans should accommodate uncertainty and change.
<i>Principle 6</i>	<i>Prioritization</i>	The most desirable parking spaces should be managed to favour higher priority uses.

## Recommended Actions and Strategies

This section contains the recommended actions and strategies. Each provides a general direction to shape the Town's overall approach to parking. Implementation is expected to take place through routine operations, major infrastructure improvements by the Town, capital investment on private properties and delivery of targeted programs.

### Management of On-Street Parking

Action 1:	<i>On-Street Stall Markings</i>	With the exception of handicap stalls, individual on-street parking stalls should not be marked. The intent is to reduce maintenance and provide flexibility in the use of the curb line based on vehicle sizes.
Action 2:	<i>Streetscape Redevelopment</i>	As the streetscape along a block is redeveloped, curb line parking should be maintained and the number of parking stalls should be kept as close to the original number as possible. The loss of one or two parking stalls to meet aesthetic and operational considerations at intersection bulbs is acceptable.

- Action 3: *Preserving Curb Line* The Town should limit the number of new curb cuts and access points onto streets in an effort to preserve the largest amount of curb line parking possible. Where a new driveway has to be created a shared driveway should be used. Where a parcel has access to a rear lane this should be used to provide vehicle access to the parcel.
- Action 4: *Handicap Parking* The provision of handicap parking stalls in private parking lots is regulated by the Alberta Building Code. The Alberta Building Code does not apply to the management of public road rights of way. The Town should provide at least one designated handicap parking stall per block in a location where access up onto the sidewalk is provided with a para-ramp.
- Action 5: *Large Vehicle Parking* The agricultural community and tourism communities often need parking for vehicles larger than the typical 18-22 foot long private vehicle. The Town should identify areas for larger vehicle parking such as recreational vehicles and cattle liners through wayfinding signage and information materials. One possible area is the curb line parking along the east side of 50 Street between 46 Avenue and 49 Avenue and between 53 Avenue and 55 Avenue.
- Action 6: *Encroachment into Residential Areas* Parking for commercial uses should not be allowed to encroach into adjacent residential areas as it undermines neighbourhood stability and detracts from residential character. For the purposes of this action/policy encroachment is any commercial use parking that occurs on a street not marked for on-street parking for non-residential uses on the map in Appendix C.

### **Town Owned Parking Lots**

- Action 7: *Number and Location* The existing Town parking lots shown on the map in Appendix C are well located to serve the various activities in the commercial part of Downtown. These lots should be retained and improvements should be made to their general appearance and attractiveness. This includes more defined pedestrian connections to and from the parking lots and sidewalk network and links to a wayfinding system.
- Action 8: *Off-Street Stall Markings* All parking stalls in paved off-street parking lots should be clearly marked.

## Appearance and Design of Off-Street Parking

- Action 9: *Appearance of Parking Areas* Parking areas both privately owned and publicly owned should be attractive and improve the visual environment to the greatest extent possible. This can be accomplished through planting shade trees and providing a low level (maximum 3 feet high) screen fence to fill the gap between buildings along the street frontage.
- Action 10: *Parking Structures* The economics of development in Downtown Ponoka do not support the construction of parking structures (above ground - \$15,000 per stall or below ground - \$30,000 per stall) at this point in the community's evolution. This may change in the future. If built, parking structures will be expected to have a high quality of appearance from all sides visible along a public street. This can be accomplished through a liner building consisting of retail/commercial space at grade and/or intense landscaping and/or high quality architectural appearance.
- Action 11: *Stand-Alone Parking* The only stand-alone parking facilities, meaning parking facilities not on the same site as a principal use, should be those owned and operated by the Town. This ensures that sharing of parking will occur and avoids creating an incentive to replace building mass with private surface parking lots.
- Action 12: *Building Facades* Where a building façade faces into a permanent off-street parking area, the façade should be as clean and attractive as possible. For rear facades the standard will be less than for side facades in recognition of the "utilitarian" aspect of rear lane access. The intent is to help make the parking area as attractive and inviting as possible.
- Action 13: *Murals* Where blank walls face into permanent off-street parking areas, the Town should make use of the opportunity to install a mural or similar art to create an attractive edge to the parking area.

## Relation to Pedestrian Circulation Network

Action 14: *Pedestrian Links* To succeed in getting drivers to become pedestrians in the Downtown a complete and functional pedestrian circulation system needs to be established between all major off-street parking areas and all Downtown destinations. This means pedestrian facilities on both sides of the street and continuous routes.

Action 15: *Attractive Walking Environment* Available parking areas and location of public parking lots must work with an attractive and safe pedestrian system if drivers are to be encouraged to park two or three blocks from concentrated areas of activity. This means providing adequately wide sidewalks, street trees for shade and visual appeal and amenities such as benches, waste receptacles and wayfinding signage.

## Managing the Demand for Parking

Action 16: *Transportation Modes* Ponoka does not, at this point in time, have a mass public transit system that can offset the need for parking in the Downtown. The community can focus on other active transportation modes such as walking and cycling as part of its approach to managing the demand or pressure for Downtown parking.

Action 17: *Bicycle Facilities* The Town should provide bicycle parking facilities along streets as each street is re-constructed and business owners are encouraged to provide bicycle parking and changing facilities for their staff. Having these facilities available to the general public and employees is intended to encourage use of a non-motor vehicle means of getting to the Downtown which then takes away some need for vehicle parking. At least one location for sheltered bicycle parking should be explored.

Action 18: *Employee and Business Owner Parking* Encourage employees and business owners to use parking on-site where available from a rear lane or more peripheral, less used public on-street and off-street parking areas.

## Signage and Communication

- Action 19: *Regulatory Signs* The Town should undertake a review of all on-street regulatory signage to ensure that sufficient signage is in place to be enforceable and provide clear communication to drivers. Regulatory signage should be consistent in appearance and there should be as few signs as necessary.
- Action 20: *Wayfinding Signage* Clear and simple wayfinding signage should be generously distributed throughout Downtown and along the main entranceways into Downtown to assist visitors in locating parking areas. Getting drivers to parking areas should be a top priority in the overall wayfinding program within the Downtown area. Each parking area should have clear identifying signage (e.g. Free Parking Courtesy of the Town of Ponoka) and indication of permissible limits (if any).
- Action 21: *Tone of Signs* All language and messaging on signage should be positive and friendly. For example, communicate where people can park and not just where they cannot. If a sign must say “no parking” then it should also indicate where a permissible alternative can be found. The only exceptions to this approach should be those signs that must meet an enforceability standard (e.g. no parking here to corner).
- Action 22: *Marketing Available Parking* The Town should prepare and install directional signage to show customers and visitors where to access parking. Pamphlets with similar information should be prepared for distribution by Downtown businesses and the same information should be made available through social media and websites.

## Parking Requirements for Development

- Action 23: *Remove Requirements for Non-Residential Uses* The Land Use Bylaw should exempt non-residential uses in the designated commercial and mixed use areas of the Downtown from providing off-street parking.

- Action 24: *Encourage Rear Lane Parking* Despite any exemption for off-street parking, the development of non-residential properties should be encouraged to provide parking stalls in the rear of the property where rear access is provided by a lane.
- Action 25: *Residential Uses* Residential uses within the Downtown Area should continue to provide off-street parking for each dwelling unit. Unlike other uses, sharing parking for residential can be difficult and the lack of dedicated parking for each dwelling unit may work against efforts to successfully incorporate residential use into the desired mixed use setting.
- Action 26: *Relaxing Residential Parking Requirements* Parking for residential uses must continue to be provided on-site and relaxations based on available street parking should be avoided. While the short term may suggest ample parking is available, future intensification and infill will result in more households sharing the available supply of on-street parking.

### **Time Restrictions and Pricing Structures**

- Action 27: *Time Restrictions* The Town should continue with the limited amount of time restrictions that are currently in place. Introducing further time restrictions should be based on demonstrated need to encourage higher rates of turnover and accommodation of short term parking. When time restrictions have to be modified in the future the following arrangements should be considered:
- Preserve all on-street parking for short term parking (less than 2 hours);
  - Limit the Town parking lots on 49 Avenue and 51 Avenue to up to 4 hours parking;
  - Allow parking longer than 4 hours to occur in the Kinsmen Lot and the lot on 52 Avenue and any other peripheral locations.

Action 28: *Price of Parking* The Town should continue to provide free parking on-street and in Town owned parking lots as long as possible. In the event that there is a need to introduce a pricing mechanism to modify parking patterns the highest priced parking should be located in the central part of downtown and the price should gradually decrease towards the periphery of the downtown.

### **Sharing and Partnerships**

Action 29: *Unbundling Parking* Where a private landowner has more on-site parking than what is needed for them or their tenants onsite, they should be encouraged to share or rent out the extra parking stalls to other users. “Unbundling” refers to avoiding regulations that prevent the desired sharing of facilities from occurring.

Action 30: *Partnerships* The Town should partner with the owners of existing surface parking lot to provide some public access to any surplus parking stalls that may be available. This may not be needed in the short term but may help address any increases in parking demand as intensification and revitalization of Downtown takes place. Potential private parking lots to involve in a partnership are shown on the map in Appendix C.

Action 31: *Overflow Parking* Occasionally special events may change the nature of the available parking supply due to street closures or use of Town parking lots to host an event. The Town should work with CPR to make their undeveloped properties along the west side of the railway available as overflow parking. Similar arrangements may be needed with other owners of large private parking lots close to Downtown.

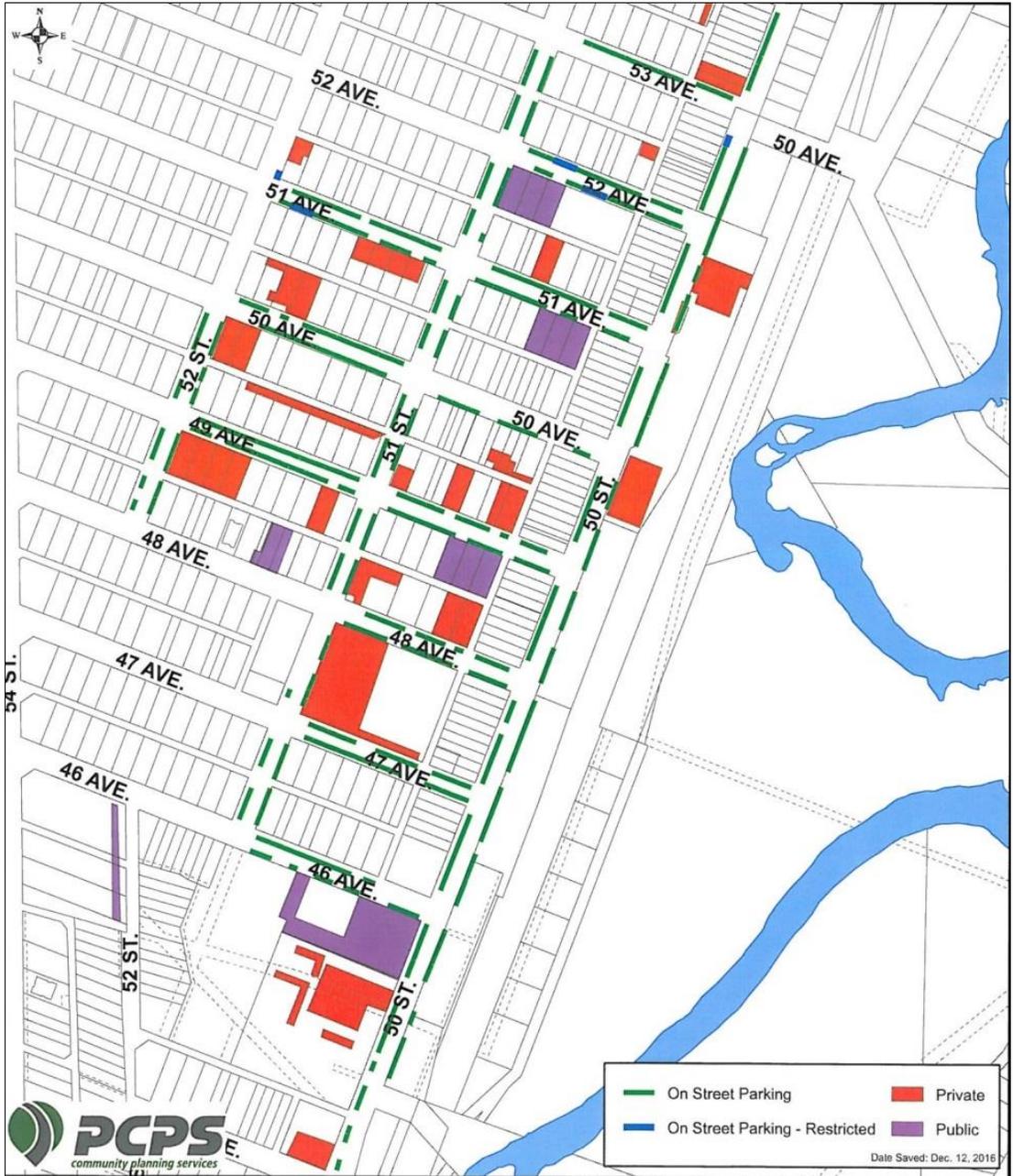
## Monitoring and Enforcement

- Action 32: *Monitoring*                      Periodic (every 5 years) monitoring of parking use and patterns in the Downtown should be undertaken. This should involve counts and license plate surveys to be able to gauge length of stays.
- Action 33: *Enforcement*                      The current regulation of parking Downtown does not lend itself to much need for enforcement beyond illegal parking in no-parking areas. Should enforcement programs be needed in the future they should begin with an educational awareness approach first (bulletin reminder followed by warning note) followed by more significant consequences for repeat or chronic offenders.

## References

- Brooks, Roger, *Parking Is Not Just For Lovers*, Roger Brooks International, 2014
- Litman, Todd, *Parking Management: Strategies, Evaluation and Planning*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2006
- Paumier, Cy, *Creating a Vibrant City Center*, Urban Land Institute, 2004
- Smith, Mary S., *Shared Parking (Second Edition)*, Urban Land Institute, 2005
- Town of Ponoka, *Municipal Development Plan*, 2012
- Avi Friedman, *Retooling Downtown Ponoka*, 2007

# Appendix A: Location of On-Street and Off-Street Parking Areas



## Appendix B: Parking Use Survey

On Wednesday, December 14, 2016 PCPS staff undertook a parking survey for the following areas:

- the three Town owned parking lots closest to Chipman Avenue on 49 Avenue, 51 Avenue and 52 Avenue;
- the on-street parking on Chipman Avenue between 50 Street and 51 Street; and
- the on-street parking areas along the west side of 50 Street extending one block north and one block south of Chipman Avenue.

The date of the survey was selected to correspond with auction day and the holiday shopping season. The weather conditions were overcast with a slight wind and a temperature of -26 degrees Celsius.

A license plate survey was carried out with observers driving/walking through the selected areas on a 30 minute cycle. The survey began at 9:00 am and ran until 5:00 pm. The license plate of the vehicle occupying the parking stall or space was recorded. Where marked stalls were available the observers matched the license plate with the stall occupied. Where marked stalls were not available, such as the parallel parking area on 50 Street, the parking spaces were approximated. In some cases the parking stall markings were obscured by a light covering of snow.

The key findings from the survey are presented in the tables below.

<b>Town Owned Parking Lot</b>	<b>North 52 Avenue</b>	<b>Central 51 Avenue</b>	<b>South 49 Avenue</b>
Number of Available Stalls	47	40	40
Total Number of Users/Vehicles	31	55	13
Average Turnover Rate per Stall (vehicle/stall)	0.66	1.38	0.33
Total Parking Hours Available (hrs)	399.5	357	340
Total Parking Hours Used (hrs)	87	238	90
Total Capacity Used (%)	22	67	26
Average Length of Stay (hrs)	2.80	4.33	6.92
Length of Stay 2 Hours or Less	16	21	0
Length of Stay More than 2 Hours and Less than 4 Hours	4	6	0
Length of Stay 4 Hours or More	11	28	13
Peak Time of Use (time of day)	1:30 pm	1:30 pm	9:00 am
Capacity Used at Peak Time (% of stalls)	36	90	33

Observations for parking lots:

- capacity used over the observation period is below the 85% use mark that would suggest a highly used parking lot with no remaining capacity; North and South lots have substantial capacity available
- longer term stays greater than 4 hours represents majority of use; short term stays most prominent in Central lot

<b>On- Street Parking Area</b>	<b>50 Street</b>	<b>Chipman Avenue</b>
Number of Available Stalls	16	24
Total Number of Users/Vehicles	100	135
Average Turnover Rate per Stall (vehicle/stall)	6.25	5.63
Total Parking Hours Available (hrs)	136	204
Total Parking Hours Used (hrs)	70	137.5
Total Capacity Used (%)	51	67
Average Length of Stay (hrs)	0.70	1.02
Length of Stay 1 Hour or Less	104	123
Length of Stay More than 1 Hour and Less than 2 Hours	3	13
Length of Stay 2 Hours or More	2	6
Peak Time of Use (time of day)	11:30 am and 2:00 pm	11:30 am and 12:30 pm
Capacity Used at Peak Time (% of stalls)	69	96

Observations for on-street parking areas:

- 50 Street is only area surveyed with a parking time restriction; number of short term stays includes repeat visits at different points in day
- capacity used over the observation period is below the 85% use mark that would suggest a highly used parking area with no remaining capacity

## Appendix C: Map of Public and Potential Shared Parking Areas

