



Community Transportation Plan

Appendix C: Parking



Appendix C: Decatur's Existing Parking Conditions

A. Parking Assets

The following description of existing parking resources characterized as "assets" allow the City to implement further plans and maximize the benefit received from public parking.

On-Street Parking

The most important public parking resource is the supply of actual parking spaces. Decatur's supply of public parking spaces is mostly on-street; with most of the metered on-street parking spaces located downtown. Some metered spaces have two hour time limits while others have no time limit at all. Meter rates were recently increased to \$1.50 per hour to match rates commonly charged in parking garages in downtown Decatur. This change came highly recommended in order to reflect the fact that on-street spaces are often in locations that are closer to the user's destination and should therefore be priced accordingly.

Parking controls are necessary to assure that on-street parking supply is used in a manner consistent with the adjacent land use and the demand for parking which accompanies that land use. For example, retail and commercial areas tend to have many customers visiting for short periods of time. This means that the curbside parking near retail businesses should not be occupied by all-day parkers; turnover of these parking spaces is needed to provide parking for numerous users throughout the day. Long-term parking meters may be installed as a means of charging commuters and employees for their all-day use of the public right-of-way. The following section presents the types of metering systems and payment mechanisms currently in use throughout Decatur.

Parking meter zones are established by the Decatur City Commission. Meters are enforced between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. weekdays and Saturdays other than holidays. City code determines the parking meter revenue is to be levied and assessed "as a fee to provide for the proper regulation, control and inspection of traffic upon the public streets; to cover the cost of supervising, regulating and inspecting the parking of vehicles in the parking meter zones; the cost of placing and maintaining lines or markings, designating parking spaces in parking meter zones; and the cost of the purchase, supervision, inspection, installation, operation, maintenance, control and use of the parking meters installed in accordance with this article and for other purposes." Parking availabilities observed on are shown in Table 1.

In locations where un-metered spaces on residential streets are being routinely used by commuters and customers of nearby commercial establishments, parking access can be restricted at designated hours to nearby residents and their visitors with appropriate government-issued permits. The program is not intended to guarantee a resident the parking space(s) in front of their property but it does enable residents and their visitors to more readily find parking on their street.

Table 1. Daytime Usage in On-Street Parking Spaces

Number of Parking Spaces			
Parking Deck / Lot	# of Unoccupied Spaces	# of Unoccupied Spaces	Total Unoccupied on-street parking spaces
	West or South side	East or North side	Total of both sides (Survey Time)
North Court Square	0	0	0 at 10:30 a.m.
South Court Square	0	0	0 at 11:05 a.m.
Clairemont Avenue: West Ponce and Commerce	4 1	6 3	10 at 10:30 a.m. 4 at 12:45 p.m.
Church Street: Sycamore St. to W. Ponce	0	1	1 at 10:45 a.m.
Sycamore Street: Church to North Candler	6	4	10 at 10:40 a.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: Ponce Place to Nelson Ferry	2 5	2 1	4 at 10:55 a.m. 6 at 12:55 p.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: Commerce to Ponce Place	3 1	3 0	6 at 10:55 a.m. 1 at 12:50 p.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: Clairemont to Commerce	Not permitted	1	1 at 10:50 a.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: Church to Clairemont	1 0 0	0 0 0	1 at 10:25 a.m. 0 at 10:50 a.m. 0 at 12:45 p.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: North Candler to Church	7 6 2	3 5 2	10 at 10:25 a.m. 11 at 10:50 a.m. 4 at 12:45 p.m.
Ponce de Leon Avenue: Commerce to North Candler	Not permitted	Not permitted	On-street parking not permitted
North Candler Street Ponce to Commerce	4 6	10 9	14 spaces at 12:15 p.m. 15 spaces at 12:45 p.m.
Commerce Drive: Trinity to Swanton	3	2	5 at 10:30 a.m.
Commerce Drive: Swanton to West Ponce	1	Not permitted	1 at 10:30 a.m.
Commerce Drive: West Ponce to Clairemont	n/a	7 4	7 at 10:30 a.m. 4 at 12:50 a.m.
Swanton Way: Commerce to Trinity	0	Not permitted	0 at 10:50 a.m.
Trinity Place: At Housing Authority	0	6	6 at 10:50 a.m.
Trinity Place: At Decatur Police Dept.	10	0	10 at 10:50 a.m.
Trinity Place: At St. Thomas More Church/School	0	0	0 at 10:55 a.m.

Data collected May 2, 2007 between 10:00 a.m. and 12:50 p.m.

Off-Street Public Parking Facilities

In addition to the large on-street parking supply, Decatur owns and manages one off-street parking facility, the Conference Center City Parking Garage at the Holiday Inn, with 208 underground spaces. The revenue collected goes to pay the garage's maintenance costs as well as the debt service on the bonds that paid for its construction. The original bond payment schedule indicates the bonds will be completely paid off in 2008.

The City does not manage the day to day operations of this facility or operate any shared parking agreements. Typically, if a municipality is in the "business" of managing parking facilities it has several assets under its control, giving financial flexibility if one asset is underperforming. As shown in Table 2, 63 percent parking occupancy in the City-owned convention center City parking garage was observed mid-morning on a weekday in May 2007 (between 10 am and Noon) during a conference event. The purpose for the observation was to assess the potential to "share" parking with a nearby businesses that may not want to provide parking exclusive to their establishment. In other words, they would want to take advantage of the financial benefits of "shared parking" by buying spaces in the Convention Center deck. The mid-morning observations were used to estimate surplus and deficiencies in the existing parking supply. An expanded presentation of this idea is offered later in this chapter.

Table 2. Daytime Usage in "Public" Off-Street Parking Facilities

Parking Deck / Lot	Number of Parking Spaces			% Occupied
	# of Occupied Spaces	# of Unoccupied Spaces	Total # of Spaces	
City-owned convention center (adjacent to Holiday Inn) Public pays \$1.50 per hour	131 - 174	34 - 77	208	63 - 84 %
Decatur Town Center (near Mick's restaurant) Public pays \$1.50 per hour	407 - 421	80 - 94	501	81 - 83
Renaissance / Wachovia / Commerce Plaza Public pays \$1 per hour after 1 st (free) 15 minutes	880 - 935	265 - 320	1200	73 - 78
Town Square Condos Public pays \$5 or retail token	186 - 207	2 - 7 retail and 10 - 26 residential	219	85 - 95
City Hall Public pays \$3 flat fee or \$5 flat fee weekends and after 4 pm weekdays	99 - 105	0 - 6	105	94 - 100
United Methodist Church Permit parking only	100 - 113	55 - 68	168	60 - 67
Baptist Church Permit parking only	10	390	400	3
One West Court Square (retail portion only) Requires a retail token		2 - 10		
DeKalb County Courthouse Public pays \$2 flat fee	912 - 1060	140 - 288	1200	76 - 88
Totals	2,738	1,263	4,001	68
Facilities highlighted in yellow have potential parking supply to offer in shared-parking agreement. Data collected April 2, 2007 and repeated May 2, 2007 between 10:00 a.m. and 12:40 p.m.				

Authority

The City Commission has the authority to establish a Parking Authority. The City Commission currently fulfills this role. The general purpose of the Authority is declared to be that of acquiring, constructing, equipping, maintaining and operating parking lots, garages, decks, and the usual facilities related thereto. The Authority has the following powers: to construct, erect, acquire, own, repair, remodel, maintain, add to, extend, improve, equip, furnish, operate and manage projects, as hereinabove defined, the cost of any such project to be paid in whole or in part from the proceeds of revenue bonds or other funds of the Authority or from such proceeds or other funds made available to the Authority; to borrow money for any of its corporate purposes and to execute evidences of such indebtedness and to secure the same and to issue negotiable revenue bonds payable solely from funds pledged for that purpose, and to provide for the payment of the same and for the rights of the holders thereof. The Authority is specifically authorized from time to time to sell, lease, grant, exchange or otherwise dispose of any surplus property, both real and personal.

B. City Parking Policies

Parking demands in Decatur are affected greatly by location and the predominant land uses. Greater densities imply more intensive parking demand although they can also create opportunities for non-automotive trips. Likewise, mixed-use districts can enable more trips without automobiles and provide opportunities for parking spaces to be shared by multiple users during a day and evening.

The ability to provide on-street parking supply is largely affected by street conditions such as roadway width, sight-lines and the presence of driveways, fire hydrants, fire access lanes, loading zones and bus stops. Streets in commercial areas are typically managed with the intention of maximizing the availability of parking for the general public more than streets within single-family residential neighborhoods. The management can include measures that physically create parking spaces such as parking space striping and use-restrictions that affect the frequency of space turnover.

Decatur has implemented a range of policies for the development and management of parking including a curb-side meter policy, requirements for construction of predetermined minimum numbers of parking spaces to accompany new development, site plan review to offer developers alternatives to the minimum parking requirements, and a residential parking program to reserve parking spaces on residential streets for local residents.

Minimum Parking Requirements

In common with most jurisdictions in the United States, the City sets minimum parking requirements for specified uses in the *Zoning Ordinance*. These are shown for selected uses in Table 33. In the Downtown Decatur Special Pedestrian Area (walking distance to the Downtown Decatur MARTA station), variances to these requirements have been requested by developers and some have been granted by the city depending on the use of the building and if they have worked out shared parking agreements.

Table 3. Selected Minimum Parking Requirements in Decatur

Single-family dwellings	1 space per dwelling unit
Townhouses / high-density single-family dwellings	1.5 spaces per unit
Multi-family dwellings	1.5 spaces per unit
High-rise residential/RMH district	1 space per unit
Senior housing	1 space per 2.25 units
General retail	1 space per 200 sq. ft.
General office including government	1 space per 400 sq. ft.
Restaurants	1 space per 100 sq. ft.
Hotels and motels	1 space per 1.25 guestrooms

Source: *Decatur Zoning Ordinance*

By city ordinance, parking spaces for multiple-family dwelling shall be located on the same lot as the building to be served and not more than 300 feet from each dwelling unit along the nearest pedestrian way. Parking requirements for developments with more than one use shall be determined by adding the parking requirements for the different uses within the development. The purpose of this regulation is to provide standards for high-density residential (maximum of 70 families per acre) or mixed-use developments in the downtown Decatur area, according to the following regulations:

Development standards:

Minimum off-street parking requirement: One space per dwelling unit.

Exceptions to the minimum lot area requirements for a downtown multiple dwelling may be approved subject to the following standards being considered in determining whether the exception shall be approved:

1. The suitability of the proposed exception in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby properties.
2. The impact that the proposed exception will have on the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby properties.
3. The impact that the proposed exception will have on the public safety, traffic on the public streets, transportation facilities, utilities and other public services.
4. The impact that the proposed exception will have on established property values and on the health, safety, comfort and general welfare of the residents of the city.

Actual Usage of Private Downtown Residential Parking Garages:

As indicated in Table 3, observations were made at the Town Square Condominium parking garage in downtown Decatur at 5:30 a.m. on a weekday in January 2007. The purpose of the early morning observations was to assess conditions before residents left their homes for the day.

Table 4. Nighttime Usage in Private Downtown Residential Parking Garage

Town Square Condo Parking Deck (bounded by Ponce, Sycamore, Church)				
	Occupied	Unoccupied	Total	% Occupied
Marked for "Retail" (public) Use with token or \$5 charge	2	17	19	10.5%
Unmarked (residents)	22	31	53	41.5%
TOTAL	24	48	72	33.3%
Data collected January 10 and 11, 2007 prior to 6 a.m.				

The data presented in Table 4 suggest that only one out of every three parking spaces provided at Town Square Condos is necessary. It was noted that several residential units were "for sale" at the time so allowing for some vacancies it is still likely the development is "over-parked". This is an asset and a financial burden on the developer/owner; an asset they can market as "plenty of parking" or a burden if selling to people who wish to "shed" a car. The practice of bundling downtown housing with parking may lead to excessive vehicle ownership since there is no constraint on parking.

Consider the vast amount of available parking in existing parking garages in downtown Decatur that cater to daytime workers whose need for parking begins around 7:30 a.m. and ends about 5:30 p.m.; times when most downtown residents don't need parking spaces. Herein is the potential to "share" parking spaces. These parking assets are spread throughout the downtown area north, south, east and west of Decatur Square. The complete list is provided in Table 2. Some facilities were visited before 6 a.m. on a January weekday to assess usage. Results are listed in Table 5. As would be expected, very few vehicles were parked that early in the morning. At the purported demand rate of 1.5 parking spaces for each housing unit, it could be argued that another 1,000 residential units could be approved with no additional parking provided, assuming the units are located within one or two blocks from an existing parking garage. That is, the downtown housing would be marketed without a parking space and new owners would negotiate with a parking brokerage company (or agency) who manages shared parking for the owners of any of the downtown parking garages including Town Center, Renaissance, the Baptist and Methodist churches, and Dekalb County Courthouse.

Table 5. Nighttime Usage in Downtown Parking Garages

Number of Parking Spaces				
	# of Occupied Spaces	# of Unoccupied Spaces	Total # of Spaces	Average % Occupied
Decatur Town Center Parking Garage Usage	5	496	501	1 %
Renaissance / Wachovia / Commerce Plaza	200	1000	1200	17
Total	205	1496	1701	12 %
Data collected January 10 and 11, 2007 prior to 6 a.m.				

Delivery (truck) loading requirements

Where required, one or more off-street loading berths or spaces shall be provided on the same or adjoining lot with the facility it serves, either inside or outside a building. A loading berth shall have minimum dimensions of 12 feet by 35 feet by 14 feet overhead clearance. A loading space need not be a full berth but shall be sufficient to allow normal loading operations appropriate to the property served. The zoning administrator shall determine the sufficiency of the space, but in no case shall this space or its use hinder the free movement of vehicles and pedestrians over a street or sidewalk.

Table 6. Selected Minimum Parking Requirements

Size of facility (gross floor area)	Required loading berth
10,000-- 40,000 square feet	1
40,000--100,000 square feet	2
100,000--160,000 square feet	3
160,000--240,000 square feet	4
240,000--320,000 square feet	5
320,000--400,000 square feet	6
Each 100,000 square feet over 400,000	1

Residential Parking Program

In 1979, Decatur began implementing Residential Permit Parking as a way to give residents priority for spaces on residential streets. This program is critical in addressing residents' concerns about parking spillover. It enables high-density development to be next to low-density residential areas. The program is working well. No recommendations for change are deemed necessary.