

6. Parking Facilities Strategy

Policy:

Strategically placed infrastructure can encourage investment and development. The community considers parking a vital part of its infrastructure to support desirable development in the City Center. Management of these assets further enhances the area, coordinating efforts in order to offer employees, customers and residents of the City Center a wide range of appropriate parking choices.

Key Downtown Development Workshop Report Recommendations

- Manage employee parking.
- Develop new parking facilities.

Background

An important function of city government is to provide the community with basic services that its citizens deem necessary. The community has long recognized parking in the downtown as a necessary service. In recent years the need for additional parking inventory in the central business district has been increasingly recognized.

The City has managed Bellingham's downtown parking

inventory for many years. Highlights in the history of city-provided parking resources downtown include:

- The first parking meters were installed in 1947 and charged one cent per hour.
- Meter rates were increased to a dime an hour in 1961.
- The City responded to downtown demand and built the first parking structure in 1972.
- The early 1980's saw two new surface lots and addi-

tional on street parking added to the public inventory.

- Parking meter rates went to a quarter an hour in 1992.
- The fifth floor was added to the existing Parkade and the Downtown Parking Commission was created in 1994.
- The City acquired property at Railroad Ave. and Holly Street in 1996 as a first step in building a new parking structure.
- In 2000 Bank of America donated its parking garage on Railroad Avenue to the City.



Parking facilities should be designed to reinforce the traditional commercial building context of downtown. This design for a new garage recently completed in Boulder, Colorado, includes a "wrap" of retail and office space that animates the street edge.

Citizen interest in the downtown and its future has always been high. The need to provide adequate parking to accommodate customers, residents, and employees has been articulated in numerous studies and plans. Participants in the Downtown Development Workshop of 1998 recorded much support for expanding the off-street parking inventory and making other system im-

provements to attract new retail, office, and residential users.

The question for the community then becomes not so much IF new off street inventory is added but rather when it will be provided, where, and how it is to be paid for.

Issues and Opportunities

The City Center Master Plan consultant team suggested that plans for further improvements to the parking system take the following issues and opportunities into account.

Parking should not lead development, but rather advance WITH development. Parking facilities should support new development and infill. Providing parking facilities prematurely can result in the facility being the wrong size or in the wrong location. The public resources needed to fund new facilities must be invested carefully to ensure the maximum return.

Parking facilities should be of similar size and scale to the local development environment. Multiple, smaller, parking structures that complement neighborhood characteristics (within a 2 1/2 block market radius) should be promoted over a single large structure. Smaller structures offer greater design flexibility and can be tailored to suit properties that pose development challenges. Smaller structures also offer more options for phasing and financing as downtown demand

changes.

Take a “systems” approach to parking decisions. Using a “systems” approach the City can determine how the system functions to meet customer needs. All city center parking assets, structures, lots and on-street spaces, should be evaluated together, as parts of a whole, to determine how the supply serves demand. Incentives and disincentives could be established that positively influence parking behavior. Rates, fines, and discounts should be coordinated to encourage the most efficient use of the parking system. Assets should be mapped and additions made so that locations form an easily traveled loop within downtown. Signs at each site should note the location of the next nearest site for customer convenience.

Combine other uses with new facilities whenever possible. Parking facilities that contain other uses are an extremely desirable from an urban design perspective. Multi-use structures can offer customers and employees, safe, convenient access to their destination. For developers this convenience translates into higher lease rates and reduced turnover. For the streetscape, multi-use structures allow increased parking capacity without the loss of pedestrian amenities.

Locate new parking facilities where they will serve the broadest uses and not just one specific interest.

Ensure that when new facilities are built that they meet

current expected parking demand of area employers, employees and customers, as well as adequate space to support future development.

Manage parking resources in the City Center; to provide adequate parking for customers. Encourage downtown workers to park at the edges of downtown or at least in lesser-congested areas to free up parking in the heavier demand commercial areas by providing special transit services, safe biking routes, and enhanced pedestrian amenities.

Recommended Actions

As shown in the following pages, a number of significant parking development projects have been discussed for the City Center. Additional off-street parking will be needed in the Commercial Core, Civic Center/Cultural District, and Morse Hardware/Railroad Avenue areas if developments planned for these sites go forward. As an initial step, a comprehensive first phase parking strategy should be developed to determine system capacity in these areas and to project the immediate future demand. As part of this strategy, potential future sites and funding sources can be identified and a property acquisition schedule can be set.

The strategy will also evaluate management of the parking assets and propose systems changes to encourage more

efficient use of existing inventories.

In order to meet current and projected demand for off-street parking and to better manage on-street inventories in the City Center, the following actions should be considered.

1. Increase parking supply for the Commercial Core.

Several specific sites have been suggested for the commercial core. Among these the intersection of Railroad Avenue and Holly Street, the intersection of Holly and State Streets, and the properties, owned by the Bank of America and the City, in the 1200 block of Railroad Avenue.

The intersection of Holly and Railroad Avenue is a key entry point to the City Center especially for motorists approaching from the east and Interstate 5. The intersection of Holly and State Streets is along this same route and may be an ideal site for a structure that could intercept motorists arriving from the east.

Property in the 1200 block of Railroad Avenue has been long considered an opportunity. Several parcels are currently under-utilized. At the corner of Railroad and Holly sits the former Mason Bldg. site.

Current development plans call for a four story mixed use, well designed building on this

site that will set a theme for the remainder of the city center. Next to that is the recently acquired Railroad Parking Plaza, a small, older parking structure formerly owned by Bank of America. The south end of the block is given over to the drive through lanes of the Bank of America drive in banking operation. This site offers an opportunity to develop a mixed-use project, including a small parking deck.

In any case, development of additional parking inventory in the commercial core that incorporates other uses can stimulate new private mixed-use development in the area including retail, office and housing.

The redevelopment of these sites will energize the area, meeting current and future needs while further enhancing the commercial core. The parking development and related private investment will also serve as encouragement.

With development planned and already underway at the intersection of Railroad and Holly the following recommendations apply:

- **Phase One:** Redevelopment of the former Mason Building site is already proceeding and should be continued. Renovate the existing small parking structure and upgrade the commercial space and security so the facility can to support additional development.

Suggested Parking Development Strategies

- Organize and approach parking as a “system”.
 - Consider a variety of site types and locations-base selections on the surrounding land use, site topography, size of the demand, and location of parking alternatives.
 - Always provide extra parking for downtown employees and not just commercial or civic customers.
 - Serve non-parking uses at new sites (e.g., residential, commercial, arts).
 - Create pedestrian friendly edges to new parking facilities.
 - Refine parking management to develop incentive programs to encourage employees to park outside of the Commercial Core Area or to reward carpooling and bus use.
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- **Phase Two:** Evaluate feasibility of a new mixed-use parking structure on the southern Bank of America parcel.

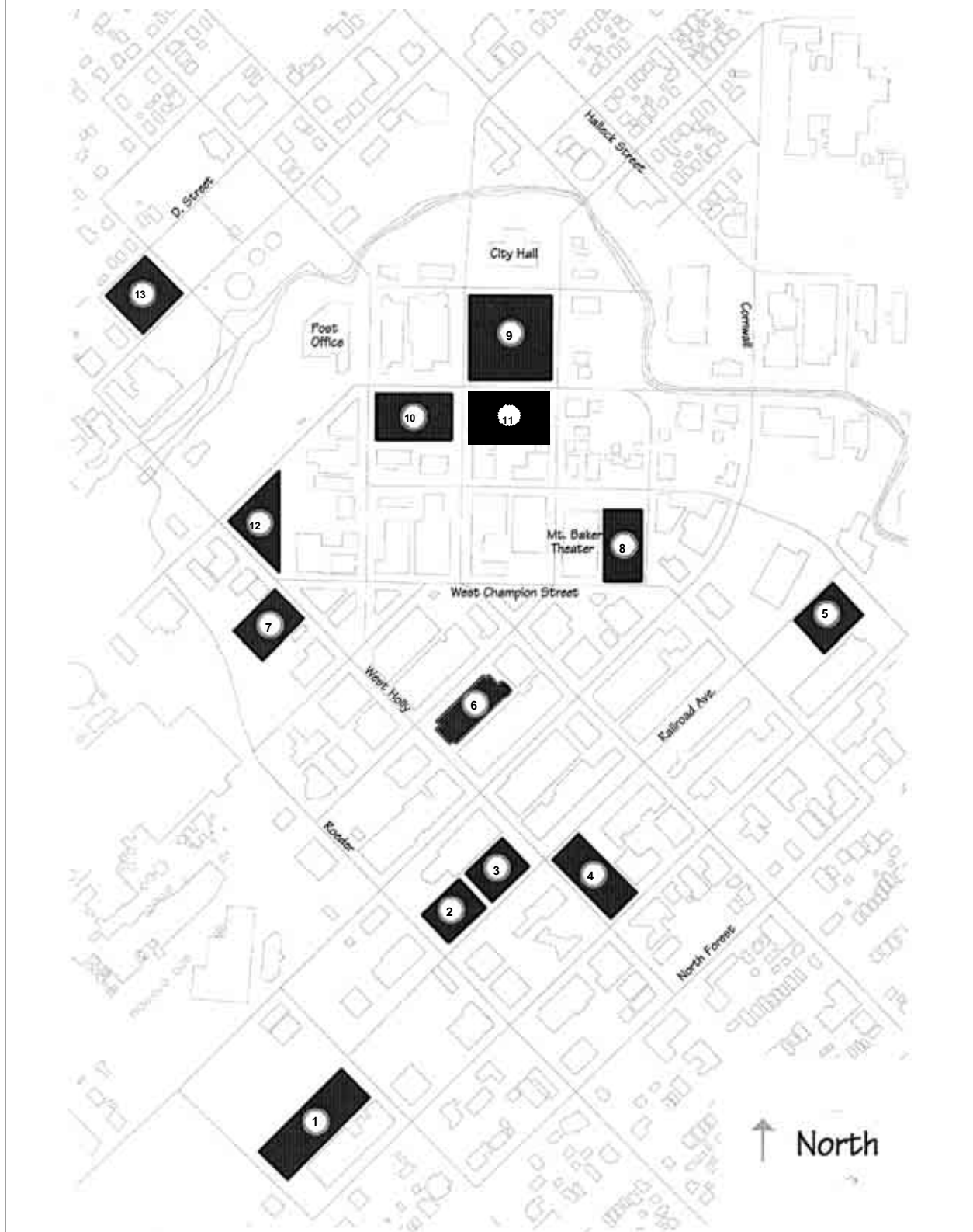
Existing and Potential Public Parking Sites

The following list and accompanying map present key downtown parking sites that include public spaces. One large site already exists but the others are potential new facilities. Most could include some parking available to the general public, as well as spaces assigned for uses on or adjacent to the site. The potential projects on this list will not be needed in the near future, but all would make appropriate sites for additional downtown parking as the need for such develops.

Map #	Site Name	Existing or Potential
RAILROAD AVENUE AREA		
1.	S. Railroad Ave. and the Farmers Market site (2000 block)	Potential
2.	SeaFirst South (1200 block)	Potential
3.	SeaFirst North (1200 block)	Potential
4.	State & Holly Streets	Potential
5.	N. Railroad Ave. (1400 block)	Potential
COMMERCIAL CORE		
6.	Commercial Street Parkade	Existing
7.	Holly at Champion (1200 block)	Potential
CULTURAL DISTRICT		
8.	Mt. Baker Theater (Unity St.)	Potential
CIVIC CENTER AREA		
9.	Potential Civic Plaza (200 Lottie)	Potential
10.	County site (300 Central)	Potential
11.	Block South of Library	Potential
OLD TOWN AREA		
12.	Maritime Heritage Park (Holly/Champion)	Potential
13.	Maritime mixed use	Potential

Note: Other parking facilities exist downtown and there is potential for even more sites. However, many of these existing facilities are small surface lots, are typically assigned to specific users and don't have spaces available to the general public. Some are associated with retail properties and some of these spaces may be available for customers.

Existing & Potential Public Parking Facilities Map



2. Develop parking for the Civic Center/Cultural District.

Parking near the Civic Center benefits not only visitors of area government offices, but also, civic center workers during the day and patrons of the downtown cultural facilities after hours. As vital as this resource is, the City and County should resist the temptation to place surface lots around the Civic Center area, since lots do little to enhance the urban landscape. Whatcom Creek winds its way through the northern boundary of the civic center and lends itself to creating a pleasant urban, outdoor landscape. It would be unfortunate to scatter surface parking lots throughout the area. In fact, the small surface lots south of the Civic Center would make good acquisition targets where art parks could be developed, enhancing the ambience and pedestrian experience in this area.

Additional resources will be needed to support expansion of major cultural venues in the area including the library and museum. The Mount. Baker Theater will also need additional parking to support increased program offerings.

3. Confirm long-term parking needs in the context of a fully integrated circulation and transportation plan.

As the City grows the need for additional parking will be inevitable. But as demand increases it becomes vitally important to evaluate the role this asset plays downtown.



As a means of enhancing the pedestrian connection along Railroad Avenue, the center median should be widened.

Participants of many downtown planning efforts have emphasized the importance of enhancing the pedestrian focus of the downtown neighborhood and minimizing the impact of so many motor vehicles. Other means of access to the City Center also need to be evaluated and improved upon such as transit services, bicycle trails, ride share programs and other currently underutilized forms of transportation.

Final parking solutions for the City Center should be addressed in an update of the circulation and transportation element of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

4. Investigate Private sector joint venture development agreements for the following sites:

- Bank of America (corner of Chestnut and Railroad)
- Holly and State Street (Key Bank site)
- Morse Hardware with park-

ing at South Railroad Avenue site (2000 block)

5. Pursue public sector joint development agreements for the following sites:

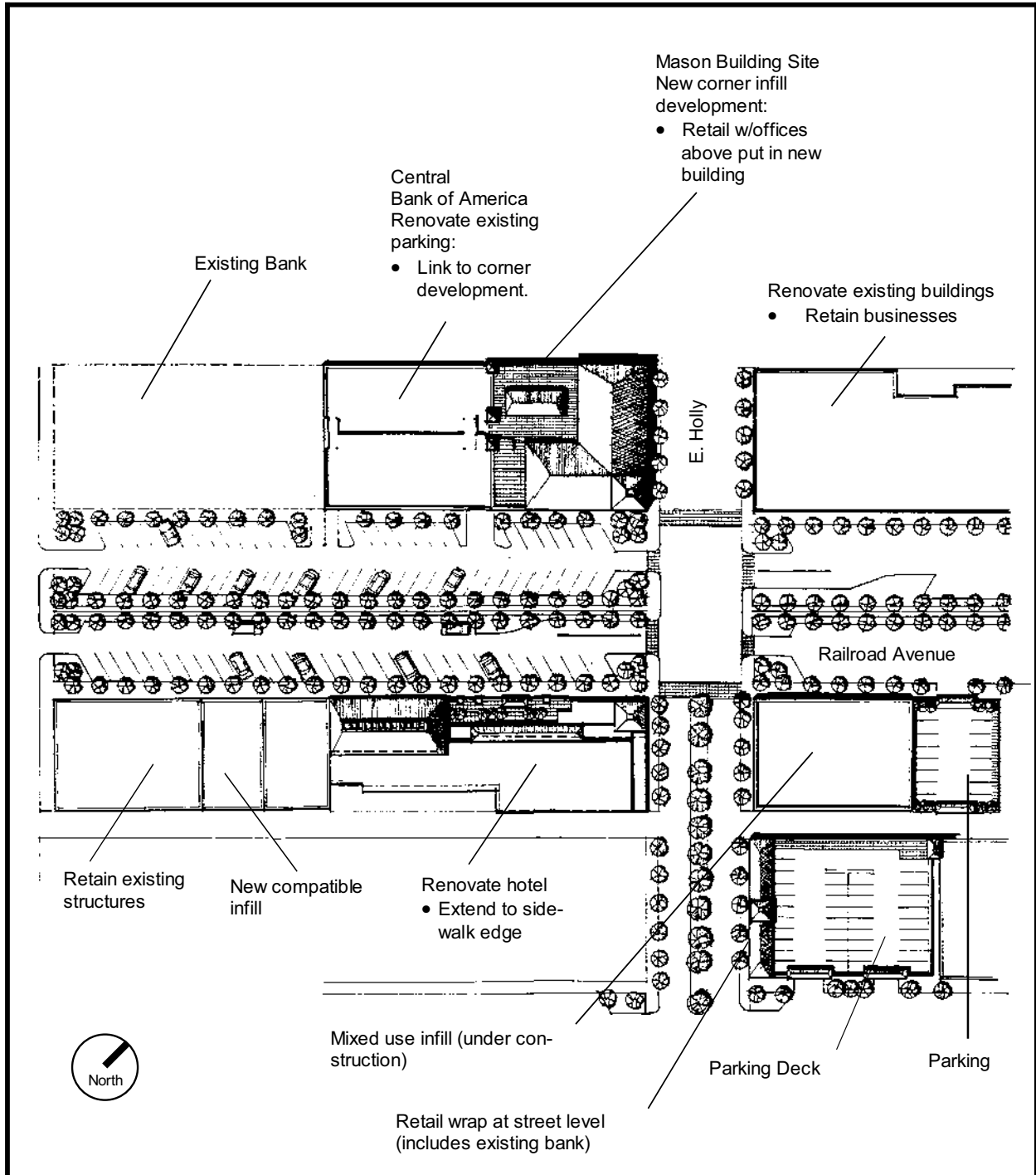
- Mount Baker Theater
- Potential Civic Plaza site
- County site

6. Develop and manage parking as a system.

Parking should be viewed and managed as an integrated "utility" that is provided by the City and paid for by users of the system. Its use should be managed and regularly monitored to gauge demand.

Holly and Railroad Avenue: Redevelopment Concept Phase One

In this Phase, a new building is constructed on the northwest corner of Holly and Railroad Avenue. The existing parking structure is renovated and storefronts are enhanced. The existing motel on the southeast corner is renovated.



Holly and Railroad Avenue: Redevelopment Concept Phase Two

In Phase Two, a new structure at the southern Bank of America parcel is developed with parking, commercial and residential uses. The existing structure is integrated or replaced and additional housing is constructed.

