

**Parking Master Plan**

**City of Decatur, Alabama**

Decatur, Alabama

**Final Report  
September, 2013**



Project ATL13104.00.00



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## Executive Summary

Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc. (TimHaahs) has been retained by the City of Decatur, Alabama, to perform a downtown parking study. The study area consists of three primary zones throughout the downtown area. Zone 1 consists of the public parking that serves the businesses and retail along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, south of Lee Street, and between 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues. This area consists of several restaurants, entertainment venues, North Alabama School of Fine Arts (NASFA), and several retailers. Zone 2 consists of the city and county government activity and related buildings and falls generally north of Lee Street, between Well and Line Streets. The third area, Zone 3, is the Historic Bank Street area. This area consists of businesses, retailers, restaurants, the historic Bank, and the planned Amphitheatre for Founder's Park that are located off of Bank Street, north of Davis Street, and up to and including Church Street.

Within the above areas are both on and off-street public parking facilities. In total, there are approximately 1,617 parking spaces, both marked and unmarked, throughout downtown that are available during the day. There are county and city hall parking lots that can provide overflow and supplemental parking after normal business hours and on weekends. These governmental parking lots provide roughly 564 spaces. Our focus is the 1,617 public parking spaces that are available during normal business hours. A majority of these spaces (1,012) are on-street spaces.

Downtown parking is currently free. We believe this should continue. All of the on-street parking is time restricted. The time restriction is two-hour maximum and should be enforced Monday through Friday. The off-street, public parking lots are well signed and, in general, located very close to the businesses and retail along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. We recommend that the time-restricted parking policies remain in effect, but not everywhere. We recommend removing time-restricted parking up in the Historic Bank Street area on the side streets from Church to Cherry Street, along Bank Street. These side streets provide proximate parking for the employees that work at the several businesses along Bank Street, leaving the parking along Bank Street for visitors and customers.

Since we recommend that time-restricted parking continue, we strongly recommend that the spaces along Bank Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, in particular, be under a more stringent and effective enforcement program. To improve enforcement, we encourage the City to use a system centered on License Plate Recognition (LPR) technology, to significantly increase the effectiveness and efficiency of managing on-street parking. The handheld or mounted devices are an extremely effective way to monitor on-street parking, whether it is parallel or angled parking, which is typical throughout downtown.

As the City continues to grow from both private and public entities, managing parking will be critical to ensuring that visitors and customers have the opportunity to use on-street spaces along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Bank Street. Overall, the downtown parking strategy we are recommending is one that emphasizes the use of off-street parking for employees, students, and other long-term parking (over 4 hours) and strictly enforcing the time-restricted parking. Furthermore, we recommend that the City consider engaging a third party to manage parking – an option that includes issuing citations, collecting fines, and enforcing parking.

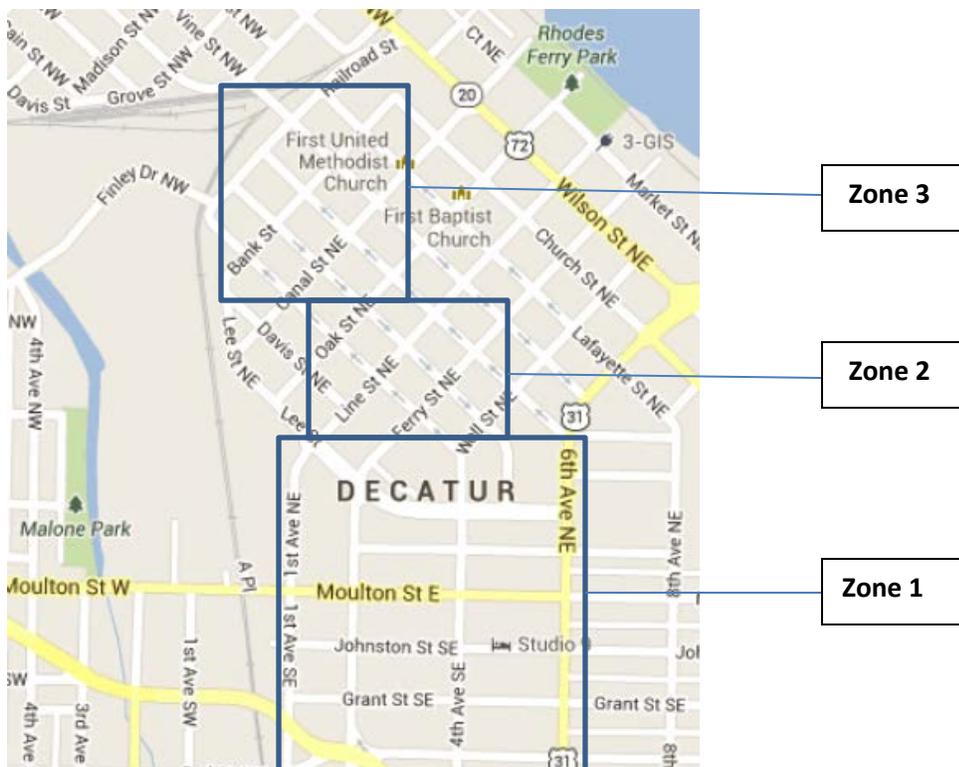
## Introduction

TimHaahs was engaged by the City of Decatur in March of 2013, to study downtown parking conditions. Our focus was the on and off-street public parking that essentially runs from Bank Street down to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. We observed parking on several weekday days, including a 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday in June. Every trip to Decatur included two days of gathering field data such as parking occupancy, observing parking tendencies and turnover, and confirming parking inventory. In addition, during the course of our study, we had the opportunity to meet with several City of Decatur staff and conduct a public workshop to get the input from various stakeholders on their perspectives on public parking. The result is the following Report that summarizes our observations and recommendations for improving current conditions, as well as laying the ground work for accommodating future conditions. From the very outset, one of our charges was to help the City stay ahead of the parking demand curve so that they are proactively planning parking initiatives and improvements, versus reacting to problems and inadequate parking conditions.

## Study Area

The following map illustrates the study area in downtown Decatur. The study area was broken into three distinct areas. Zone 1 consists of the public parking that serves the businesses and retail along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, south of Lee Street, and between 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues. This area consists of several restaurants, entertainment venues, institutional buildings (Athens State), and several retailers. Zone 2 consists of the city and county government activity and related buildings and falls generally north of Lee Street, between Well and Line Streets. The third area, Zone 3, is the Historic Bank Street area. This area consists of businesses, retailers, and restaurants that are located off of Bank Street, north of Davis Street, and up to and including Church Street.

Figure 1: Map of Study Area



## Current Parking Conditions

TimHaahs visited the City of Decatur on multiple dates to observe parking occupancy, observe parking turnover and tendencies, and, in general, collect field observations to help us better understand current parking conditions. We were in town in April (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>) and June (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>) collecting field data, meeting with City officials, and meeting with merchants and stakeholders.

The following Table 1 summarizes the on-street parking occupancy. Interestingly, our observations were very consistent during both of our visits to Decatur; however, April's activity was busier, so for modeling purposes, we will use the information we gathered on April 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.

Table 1: Parking Occupancy, April 5, 2013

City of Decatur, Alabama			
On-Street Parking, 4/5/2013			
	Existing		
Parking Area	Spaces	Noon	2:00
Bank Street, Church to Davis (Zone 3)	117	53	42
Church Street, Canal to Bank (Zone 3)	31	2	4
Lafayette, Canal to Railroad (Zone 3)	48	8	4
Vine Street, Canal to Railroad (Zone 3)	48	0	1
Walnut Street, Canal to Bank (Zone3)	30	6	2
Cherry Street, Canal to Bank (Zone 3)	30	0	2
Lee Street, Davis to Line (Zone 3)	23	2	2
1st Avenue, Lee to Grant (Zone 1)	117	20	6
2nd Avenue, Lee to Jackson (Zone 1)	115	72	44
Grant Street, 1st to 6 <sup>th</sup> (Zone 1)	53	20	18
Johnston Street, 1st to 6 <sup>th</sup> (Zone 1)	67	22	25
Moulton Street, 1st to 6 <sup>th</sup> (Zone 1)	88	50	42
4th Avenue, Lee to Jackson (Zone 1)	95	2	4
Wells Street, Lee to Cain (Zone 2)	17	8	6
Ferry Street, Lee to Cherry (Zone 2)	45	25	30
Line Street, Lee to Cherry (Zone 2)	16	12	10
Cain Street, Wells to Line (Zone 2)	40	19	22
Cherry Street, Wells to Lee (Zone 2)	32	2	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1012</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>267</b>

## On-Street Parking

In total, there are approximately 1,012 on-street parking spaces. On the day of our data collection, and again when we visited in June, the peak hour of parking activity occurred at noon. At noon, the area in and around the busiest intersection in downtown Decatur, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Moulton Street, was very busy with virtually no on-street spaces available. This section of downtown includes many restaurants, including the new Mellow Mushroom, and the very popular Brick Tavern. So, understandably, the lunchtime crowd was using many of the spaces in this area.

Overall, the peak occupancy of on-street spaces was 32%. However, in the areas where retail, restaurant, and government services existed, the peak hour of occupancy was around 70%. Many of the unused spaces are located on the side streets up in the Historic Bank Street area, between Davis and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, along Lee Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. These areas of low parking occupancy provide parking for growth and the addition of future land uses, such as the expansion of North Alabama School of Fine Arts.

## Off-Street Parking

The following table summarizes off-street parking conditions on the same day, April 5<sup>th</sup>.

Table 2: Off-Street Parking Occupancy, April 5, 2013

City Lots	Spaces	Noon	2:00
Lot 1 (Zone 3)	17	5	1
Lot 2 (Zone 3)	0	0	0
Lot 3 (Zone 3)	20	8	8
Lot 11 (Zone 1)	113	24	22
Lot 12 (Zone 1)	48	44	23
Lot 13 (Zone 1)	66	58	26
Lot 14 (Zone 1)	30	10	11
Lot 15 (Zone 1)	18	12	8
Lot 16 (Zone 1)	73	32	30
Lot 17 (Zone 1)	80	76	41
Lot 18 (Zone 1)	18	12	18
Lot 19 (Zone 1)	18	12	10
Lot 20 (Zone 1)	74	34	36
Lot 21 (Zone 1)	30	4	4
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>238</b>

Table 2, on page 4, illustrates that the peak hour of off-street parking occurred at the noon hour, which is consistent with the peak hour of activity of the on-street parking. In total, there are 605 off-street parking spaces. Overall, the peak occupancy of the off-street spaces was 55%. From a parking management perspective, the higher occupancy of the off-street parking is quite favorable (55% versus 32%). The good news is there is ample availability in the off-street parking lots which will help absorb additional parking demand as growth continues. The lots around the active 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue/Moulton Street intersection were virtually full during lunchtime.

When combining on and off-street parking, the total number of available public parking spaces is approximately 1,617. At the noon, lunchtime hour, roughly 654 spaces were occupied, which equates to a utilization rate of 40%. There are certainly areas that are very busy; however, overall, there is plenty of parking to serve the current needs of downtown Decatur.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Friday**

We observed parking on 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday (June 21<sup>st</sup>) to better understand the distribution of parking during these events. On the day of our visit, portions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and upper Bank Street were closed to accommodate pedestrians attending an outdoor concert on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and a car show on upper Bank Street. Both of these areas, and essentially the immediate area around the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue/Moulton Street intersection, were full of people. The energy in the air was fantastic to witness.

With respect to parking, the parking occupancy was almost identical to the peak hour of parking at noon. We observed approximately 631 spaces utilized at 7:00 on June 21, 2013. With a total of 1,617 spaces city-wide, the occupancy of 631 spaces represents roughly 40% of the total. Much like the noon hour, the occupancy is concentrated around the areas of peak activity. The parking around the government center was virtually empty, while the parking lots located off of Moulton and Grant Streets were extremely active in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Zone.

So, for planning purposes, we suggest using the parking demand observed the noon hour on a weekday. We also recommend that a fire lane be maintained for all activities associated with 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday.

### **Parking Adequacy**

The parking planning community determines the parking adequacy by comparing peak-hour parking demand to the "effective" supply of parking. The effective supply of parking is the amount of parking that exists that "effectively" serves users. In other words, we apply a factor, in the case of Decatur, a factor of 15% to the overall total, and arrive at a new (lower) inventory of parking for serving parking users. This 15% cushion allows us to account for misparked vehicles, the reduction of search time when trying to find a place to park, contractor parking, etc. So, 15% of the current parking inventory equates to 242 spaces, 1,617 total spaces (total of on and off-street parking) less 242 spaces equals 1,375 spaces. The 1,375 spaces represent the number of spaces that effectively (most efficiently and comfortably) serve public parkers.

From Tables 1 and 2 above, we have determined that the overall peak-hour parking demand is 654 spaces at the noon hour. Using our theory for parking adequacy, we estimate that the

current parking adequacy in downtown Decatur consists of a parking surplus of 721 spaces, or 48% utilization. This surplus will be needed as changes are on the horizon.

### **Future Parking Conditions**

Per conversations with both private and public entities, we have learned that there are some new projects that will be developed in downtown, primarily in the very active area of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Moulton Street. The potential projects will bring more parkers into the downtown; some will be short-term, while others will be long-term. The current demand in Zone 1 at the noon hour is approximately 504 spaces in both the on and off-street parking areas. Based on our discussions, we would anticipate an increase of roughly 10% more parking demand during the noon hour as some of these new developments come on line. The 10% growth represents roughly 50 additional parkers in Zone 1.

In addition, we anticipate more restaurants will be coming to both 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Bank Street, based on the success of the recently opened Mellow Mushroom. As evidenced by the increase in parking demand at the lunch hour, in and around 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Moulton Street, we would anticipate additional parking demand coming in the future from more restaurants being introduced in this zone. Based on the size of existing buildings and the potential build out or conversion of existing space, we would suggest modeling this future demand around 5,000 square feet of space. Restaurant parking demand is normally around 10 to 12 spaces per 1000 SF of space, depending on the type of restaurant. So, 5,000 SF of new restaurant space could generate an additional demand in Zone 1 of roughly 50 to 60 more spaces, most likely at the noon lunch hour.

### **Decatur Population Growth**

The ten-year growth rate, from 2000 to 2010, was 3.25% (53,929 to 55,683) per information received from the census bureau. Thus, the annual historical rate of .3% should not play a major factor in increased parking activity from a population growth perspective.

### **Future Parking Summary**

Using the anticipated impact from future developments that are planned for the City, and accounting for the potential of more restaurants being built in downtown Decatur, we estimate an increase in peak hour parking demand of approximately 100 spaces over the next five to ten years.

Overall, the existing parking system can absorb this additional demand, but the reality is most of this demand will probably occur in an already very high parking demand area, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Moulton Street. So, with this in mind, we need to consider strategies for improving parking in Zone 1 that will include stricter enforcement, and the potential construction of more long-term parking (surface or structured parking) for meeting long-term needs of the City.

### **Parking Improvements**

Based on current conditions that we have studied and our estimate of future parking needs, we believe the City needs to consider the following:

1. Purchase the off-street parking lot located off of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (Bank of Independence Lot), between Moulton and Johnston Streets and convert it to Public Parking. It appears that the City is currently leasing this lot (which is currently graveled). We believe this lot should become an asset for the City as the proximity of this parking lot to the activity in Zone 1 makes it a very desirable place to park.
2. Consider constructing a parking deck on the site of Lot 11, located off of Holly Street. This site, in conjunction with a re-working of Holly Street provides a great opportunity for a garage that serves Zone 1 and the new developments planned for the area, including the expansion at NASFA and other developments. The image below illustrates how a garage could be sited on this location.

Figure 1: Potential Site for an Off-Street Garage



If a garage is considered for the Lot 11, it may require the closing of Holly Street to create an efficient, affordable garage. However, access could be through the garage, with curb cuts for accessing businesses along Holly Street. The dimension of a parking structure for this site would be 120' x 240'. The ramp for upbound/downbound circulation would be located on the elevation facing the alley. A three-story garage, consisting of four parking levels, would provide approximately 350 spaces on this site and provide proximate parking for the core of downtown. Ultimately, the City needs to work with the various land owners to develop parking improvements along Holly Street, improvements that will incorporate Lot 11.

## Parking Strategies

There are several parking strategies and new initiatives we recommend. The first strategy is centered on parking management. With the potential increase in parking demand from new developments occurring in downtown Decatur, we believe that improving enforcement is essential to helping overall parking conditions.

One way to very effectively and efficiently improve parking enforcement is utilizing technology. A technology that many cities, universities, and others use is known as License Plate Recognition (LPR) technology. LPR uses digital cameras and lasers to perform vehicle recognition (size, shape and color) and combined with accurate GPS, automatically detects and notifies those that are enforcing parking of unmoved vehicles. Pictorial evidence is present to the enforcement officer for violation assessment. LPR can also be used for Scofflaw (those that are not paying their parking tickets) searches. All of this will aid in the enforcement and collection process of those that routinely violate the parking restrictions. Despite its sophisticated technology, LPR systems appear reliable in every day operation and in all temperatures.

Parking enforcement productivity can increase significantly with LPR enforcement systems, thereby allowing enforcement officers time for enforcing other high priority activities. It also allows enforcement regardless of weather conditions. Productivity gains will be significant with the enforcement of time limitations as manual tire chalking is essentially done using today's technology. Other advantages of LPR technology include:

- A system capable of tracking vehicles with outstanding tickets, fines, and warrants
- Allows enforcement officers to monitor time limits and prohibit users from moving to adjacent and nearby spaces
- Promotes a smaller enforcement staff dedicated to monitoring parking
- Is flexible for permit program for employees/residential permits
- Compatible with any future pay-for-parking programs
- Communicates with DMV or similar databases

LPR systems can be installed either as fixed (i.e. mounted to a column or entry gate) or mobile (i.e. mounted on a vehicle or van). In addition, mobile applications can either be affixed permanently or temporarily, allowing units to be swapped between multiple vehicles.

Most LPR systems operate using one or two cameras with the actual LPR server installed in the vehicle. The PEO (Parking Enforcement Officer) can interact with the system using a touchscreen computer installed adjacent to the driver's seat. This allows the PEO to easily view images captured, verify the information, and immediately issue a citation.

Based on our experience, we believe the cost of a LPR system will be on the order of \$50,000 to \$55,000 for the City of Decatur. We would suggest installing one fixed device on one squad car to start. We believe that one squad car can patrol the entire downtown in a relatively short amount of time, especially after the PEO has identified the "problem" areas. The following images illustrate the use of LPR and process for LPR enforcement.

Figure 2: LPR Communications (mounted on vehicle, or handheld remote)



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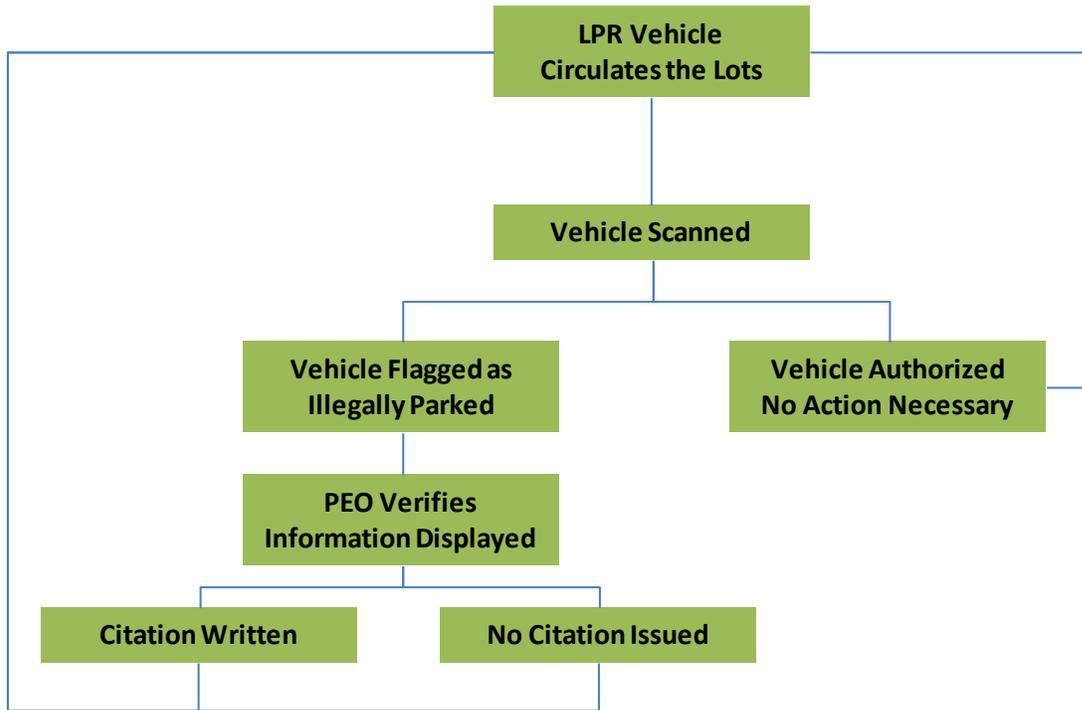
### Photo Notes

You will have the ability to attach photos to a notice when printed and left with the offending vehicle. The photos then become part of the notice record.

### Electronic Tire Chalking

You will have the ability to "time stamp" vehicles by electronically marking them for time and position so you know when "time's up," with little chance for dispute.

Figure 3: LPR Enforcement and Citation Process



Funding for the LPR system will come from improved efficiency in parking management and the collection of fines for those that are issued parking tickets. In addition, we strongly believe that parking fines should be increased.

### Parking Fines

We believe that fines for violating parking infractions be more punitive. We understand from our conversations with Municipal Judge Cook that the fee for a parking infraction (exceeding time limit) is only \$10.

The time and effort to administer a \$10 parking fine is far greater than the fine. Therefore, we highly recommend that the cost for a parking ticket be increased to \$25, which is consistent with several cities around the south.

The increase in the parking violation fee will help provide more revenue for covering the cost to administer the program, while providing a revenue stream for funding enforcement.

## **Parking Advisory Task Force**

In order to facilitate changes to the parking system, we suggest setting up a Parking Advisory Task Force or Downtown Parking Commission. The Downtown Parking Commission would be administered through Planning and Police, with an emphasis on balancing Second Avenue and Bank St. representation. The purpose of the task force or commission is to assist the Mayor and City Council on decisions regarding the Decatur parking system. Specifically, the task force will meet regularly to discuss any parking-related matters, get updated on enforcement activities, interface with merchants, and in general, provide leadership for helping parking support the needs of the City. The task force serves as the public voice to ensure that any changes to the parking system are properly shared with the community and that they be shared as part of a long-term strategy for benefitting the growth of Decatur.

### ***Membership***

For a city the size of Decatur, we envision that a five to seven member committee would comprise the task force. The task force should include:

1. Mayor appointment – citizen or employee
2. County Commission Chairman appointment – citizen or county employee
3. A representative from North Alabama School of Fine Arts – preferably someone from building
4. Director of the Downtown Redevelopment Authority
5. Downtown Redevelopment Authority appointments – one from Bank St. and one from Second Avenue
6. Representative from the Chamber of Commerce appointed by Chamber Board

We recommend that the task force administrator come from Police or Planning.

### ***Responsibilities***

We recommend that the Downtown Parking Commission's first responsibility is to establish guiding principles. We feel that this should be done immediately and prior to making any changes to the parking system. The guiding principles should be simple, easy to understand, and will set forth the objectives for all decisions and changes to the parking system. Below are four guiding principles that we have prepared for consideration:

1. Create and maintain a user-friendly, easy to access, and easy to understand parking system in downtown Decatur.
2. Regularly involve stakeholders in the decisions regarding the parking policies.
3. Make downtown more convenient and accessible for the customers and visitors.
4. Manage the on-street parking using the 85 percent parking occupancy rule.

Once guiding principles are established, the task force should begin evaluating and implementing several new initiatives for improving the downtown parking system.

One of the first responsibilities of the task force would be to determine what type of parking management organization is best for the City.

### **Parking Entity Organizational Options**

We strongly believe that the City take the proper steps towards developing a centralized parking operation in which all the assets are controlled and managed under one roof. This is one of the most logical and necessary steps to take for the City to improve its public parking assets.

A number of different parking management methods could be employed in Decatur. We feel that bringing all of the assets under one roof with a singular focus on delivering parking, provides a clear mission statement. Additionally, it creates financial unity among assets while providing strong leadership for implementing future parking initiatives (construction and renovation).

#### ***Option 1: Third-Party Parking Operator***

A third-party operator would be retained by the City to handle a set of tasks specific to the downtown parking system. A third party operator could manage enforcement, citations, citation collections, and assist with updating local zoning codes. One major advantage of retaining a third-party operator is the elimination of training costs and capital expenses to completely form the back office infrastructure of a parking department. Furthermore, a parking operator can bring expertise, experience, and industry specific processes to Decatur that the local labor does not possess.

On the other hand, a third party operator can also be more costly pending the existing resources of a municipality and the ability to transfer existing back office infrastructure into a centralized entity. In addition, the municipality loses some control with reduced daily interaction within the parking system. Similarly, it is still necessary to have a designated parking "Champion" to oversee the operator and ensure that the procedures meet the needs of the City.

A third party type operation will cost approximately \$750 per month, plus upfront costs for procuring a dedicated computer and related software (\$1,500) – a very affordable solution.

#### ***Option 2: Parking Department***

A parking department or agency is a municipal entity under the umbrella of city government. It is formed as either a separate department or as a division of an existing department such as Public Works, Transportation, or General Services.

One advantage of a parking department is the minimal administrative changes needed to consolidate activities from multiple entities into an existing department. Additionally, few changes are needed from a personnel standpoint as the majority of employees retain their job functions, titles, and benefits. Also, if revenue can be derived through parking, the revenue streams can continue to flow to either the General Fund or other designated City fund.

One key disadvantage with a parking department is the proper allocation of adequate funding for the parking needs. Since parking departments generally direct all revenues to the general fund, these funds are frequently allocated to other projects with which parking would be

competing. Frequently parking does not receive the proper attention or funds under this option to either build new facilities or to restore existing assets.

### ***Promoting the Parking System***

A common problem of downtown parking systems is that there is little effort expended to communicate and promote the mission, assets, and functions of the parking system. In an effort to support and promote Downtown Decatur economic development, the City should undertake a program to consistently inform its residents, downtown merchants, employees, shoppers, student population, and the general public regarding the way the parking system operates. In addition, the program should also address the need for consistent enforcement, the value of on and off-street parking and the plans for additional parking. The objective in promoting a downtown parking system is to transform what can often be perceived as negative image into a positive one.

### **Parking Program Information Campaign**

The informational campaign should be directed to downtown property owners, merchants, employees, shoppers, and students, and may include the following components:

1. The City's mission regarding promoting economic development, the free flow of traffic, and promoting Decatur as a great place to live, work, dine, and shop.
2. Information of Downtown Decatur's vibrancy as shopping and dining destinations.
3. A map of the downtown with the designated off and on-street parking locations and other points of interest.
4. A description of the City as a designated historic area dedicated to the principles of smart growth, including downtown walkability and connectivity.
5. Information regarding off-street parking and the facilities that the City owns that provide convenient parking for patrons and employees of the downtown business district.
6. The dedicated property management services and affordability of these off-street facilities to promote economic development and commitment to operate in a fiscally responsible manner.
7. The purpose and operation of on-street parking is designed to regulate and promote turnover, thereby making the most convenient parking spaces available to as many downtown patrons as possible.
8. The role and hours of parking enforcement is to help keep City streets safe, keep traffic moving, turnover convenient on-street spaces, and make loading zones available for commercial purposes.
9. The rationale for the issuance of parking tickets and the procedures and information to pay or contest them.
10. Parking safety tips and important / emergency phone numbers or points of contacts.

This information is best communicated through various mediums including a parking guide that can be handed out at the City Hall and Visitor’s Center, an interactive, user-friendly web page, public service announcements and bulletins, and City mailings to residents and businesses.

There are some great examples of cities all around the country that promote and explain their parking system, typically online. One great example is what the City of Tacoma has undertaken to keep citizens informed about downtown parking. There is a direct link on their website that takes patrons/citizens to information about parking. We encourage the City of Decatur, through the Downtown Parking Commission, to set up the same kind of link. This link will provide info on where to park, the cost of parking violations, special event parking, and so on.

Figure 4: City of Tacoma Link to Parking on their Main Site



Parking is accessed from the City of Tacoma’s home page. Once one launches the link, they can find out information on parking location, parking policies, parking restrictions, special event parking, etc. The “Public Parking in Downtown Decatur” map would be a perfect download or accessible link for someone to access on the City’s parking website.

The City of Huntsville, just like Tacoma, has a very similar link to their Parking website, where one can access their parking flyer and launch an interactive map that provides information about various off-street parking lots and garages – very user friendly.

### Public Relations Activities

In addition to providing valuable parking information to residents, customers, students, and visitors, the City should consider various public relations activities to reflect their important role in

the community as an advocate for the economic development and quality of life in downtown Decatur. Examples of these activities include:

1. The issuance of warnings vs. summonses for on-street overtime parking during the holiday season.
2. Periodic warnings vs. summonses to merchants who violate on-street time limitations and park in the best patron parking spots. Warnings would communicate that the success of their business depends on their customers finding convenient parking.
3. Regular meetings between the Parking Advisory Task Force and the merchants / property owners to improve communications regarding parking challenges, changing conditions, and new and developing issues.
4. Parking Advisory Task Force participation on various City of Decatur traffic, business and economic development, public safety, and planning committees.

**Lighting and Safety**

During our evening site visit and observation, it was noted that some of the off-street parking areas are dimly lit and somewhat uncomfortable. While lighting does exist, it is neither bright nor uniform and provides numerous dark areas which could be used as hiding places.

Per the table below, we recommend a minimum illumination of 2.5 footcandles for all of your off-street parking areas. This lighting level provides a very comfortable level of service for patrons and enhances passive security.

The two primary issues of lighting are intensity, or footcandles, and uniformity. In the past, minimum light levels were used in every facility without much question; yet today many owners are asking for higher lighting levels than “minimum.” These owners include not only those with a higher emphasis on user-friendliness, but also those who are concerned about security problems and would like to provide a sense of safety and comfort to all users. The level-of-service (LOS) approach is a useful concept for selection of lighting levels. Recommended gradation of the basic lighting levels, average maintained horizontal illumination at the pavement, and uniformity ratios are presented in the following universally accepted guidelines:

Horizontal Illuminance at pavement	Maintained Illumination Levels (footcandles)			
	D	C	B	A
Covered parking areas	5	6 to 7	8 to 9	10
Roof and surface parking areas	1	2	2.5	3
Uniformity ratio (average:minimum)	4:1	4:1	3:1	3:1
Uniformity ratio (maximum:minimum)	10:1	10:1	8:1	8:1

We recommend a minimum LOS B and a targeted LOS A for all downtown parking areas. Formal measurements of lighting can be conducted by TimHaahs staff if needed. The lighting source, or lamp, should disseminate a white light, similar to that of a LED fixture or metal halide fixture. The white light is more pleasant and makes it much easier to discern the color of a car or other objects.

## Public Workshop

A public workshop was held on Thursday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at City Hall, in order to allow the general public to voice their perspectives and concerns regarding the parking system in downtown Decatur. The workshop focused on identifying the existing strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. The two-hour workshop consisted of Tim Haahs and members of the public, including City representatives. To allow for discussion, the workshop was divided into breakout groups with a group leader recording the responses. Below is a summary of the most common remarks received during the workshop.

### Strengths of the existing parking system:

- Proximity is good, front door availability
- Free parking brings business downtown
- There seems to be ample parking

### Weaknesses of the existing parking system:

- Merchants park in customer spaces
- Difficult to find an available parking space close to some businesses
- Not enough premium spaces
- Lighting is poor for the off-street parking
- Inconsistent enforcement
- Safety is questionable in some areas
- Do we need two-hour parking in the Bank Street zone
- Inadequate handicap parking in Bank Street zone
- Lack of off-street parking in Bank Street zone
- Better marking of parking spaces

### Opportunities for improvement of the parking system:

- Better enforcement
- Improve perception of pedestrian safety
- Improve lighting in all parking areas
- Consider building more off-street parking and/or a garage
- Trolley from government parking area, after hours, to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue

## Time Restrictions

The following map illustrates our recommendations for time restrictions throughout all of Downtown. **Red** indicates streets where the two-hour time restriction will remain in effect and be enforced. **Green** indicates where there are no on-street time restrictions. **Black** indicates No Parking. **Orange** indicates two-hour parking on one side of the street (north) and no time restrictions on the other side of the street (south).

Figure 5: Recommended Changes to Time Restrictions throughout Downtown



## Parking Delineation/Striping

A very simple improvement that is needed throughout all of downtown is the improved striping for on-street parking spaces, whether they are parallel spaces or angled spaces. We strongly encourage the restriping of all spaces in town that fall under our Two-Hour Time Restriction recommendation. The parallel spaces should have lines running perpendicular to the curb and extend 9' in width by 22' in length. These lines will really help delineate the parking spaces and make it much easier for patrons to see where parking exists on street.

Where we have recommended no time restrictions (Zone 3), we suggest that any existing parking lines be removed.

## Recommendations

The following are our recommendations for improving current conditions and laying the foundation for accommodating future parking needs. We have organized these recommendations by Zone:

### Zone 1: 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue area

1. Stricter enforcement of the two-hour parking time limits along 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenues, Moulton, Johnston, and Grant Streets, using LPR technology as the means of enforcing the time limits on these streets. Eliminate the two-hour parking on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and along areas on Lee to Bank Street per the Map on page 16. There should be a two-hour restriction on the north side of Holly Street, and no time restrictions on the south side of the street (accommodating pick up and drop off of buses).
2. Improve Lot 11, the public lot located off of Holly Street with more lighting and restriping the lot so that it is consistent with one-way traffic flow. This lot can be redone in conjunction with other development being considered for the area. This lot is also a candidate for a future parking structure as it is conveniently located to a very active area.
3. City Lot 21 is not user-friendly and difficult to find. Because of this lot's visibility, we think it is ideal for employees that work on that side of town. To make the lot more appealing to any user, we recommend that the lighting be upgraded to a minimum of two footcandles and that a link to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue be created to help accessibility into this area. Cut back all overgrown shrubbery to improve visibility and enhance passive security. In short, enhance this lot to provide proximate, overflow parking for those that spill out of Lot 17, which is a very well used, off street parking lot.
4. Purchase the Bank of Independence Lot, which the City is currently leasing and convert it to a City's parking asset. The lot is currently gravel, so to make it more attractive, we recommend that the lot be paved and lights erected so that it provides an acceptable level of service for any intended users.
5. For all of the on-street and off-street spaces, restripe the stalls so that the parking spaces are more visible, thus more usable.
6. We do not recommend the installation of parking meters or pay stations at this time.
7. All public parking lots need abundant, uniform lighting on the order of 2.0 to 2.5 footcandles to improve passive security.

8. Ensure that the parking code corresponds with the posted signs.

#### Zone 2: City and County Government area

1. Stricter enforcement of the two-hour parking time limits along on all of the streets around the government area using LPR technology.
2. For all of the on-street and off-street spaces, restripe the stalls so that the parking spaces are more visible, thus more usable.
3. Consider running a trolley from the government area to the active areas on both Bank Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, especially during special events such as 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday, to help improve the parking/pedestrian experience. There is a significant amount of available parking in this area after hours and on weekends. The trolley can improve any perceptions about safety and walking distances. The parking in this area is a great example of shared parking, which should be one of the City's guiding principles.
4. Remove the two-hour time restriction on Lee Street from Cain to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and paint the curb red for and erect signs indicating "No Parking Zone." This area seldom sees any parked vehicles, but since it is on a curved road and along a main route, we recommend that the area be a No Parking Zone, just like the area on Lee Street from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
5. We do not recommend the installation of parking meters or pay stations at this time.
6. All public parking lots need abundant, uniform lighting on the order of 2.0 to 2.5 footcandles to improve passive security
7. Ensure that the parking code corresponds with the posted signs.
8. No time restrictions along Lee to Bank Street, between Cherry and Oak, per the Map on page 16.

#### Zone 3: Historic Bank Street area

1. Pave the City Lot located between Bank and Railroad Streets to provide additional, usable off-street parking for special events and future growth in this area.
2. Eliminate the two-hour parking restriction on Church, LaFayette, Vine, Walnut, and Cherry Streets.
3. Restripe all of the parking spaces in this area and along Bank and Lee Streets to better define the on-street spaces. We suggest that the stripes run perpendicular to the curb and run the full width of the parking stall (8 to 9 feet). The length of the parallel spaces should be a minimum of 22 feet.
4. Add a minimum of two new ADA spaces on Bank Street, properly configured, for meeting accessible requirements in this area.
5. Apply stricter enforcement of the two-hour parking time limits along "upper" Bank Street.
6. As more residential comes on line, it will require more parking. The location of the residential will play a key role in determining the best parking strategy for this part of town. Ideally, residents can park for "free" on Lafayette, Vine, Walnut and Cherry streets, where ample room currently exists for accommodating on street parking.
7. We do not recommend the installation of parking meters or pay stations at this time.
8. All public parking lots need abundant, uniform lighting on the order of 2.0 to 2.5 footcandles to improve passive security

9. The City needs to explore options for creating nested or reserve parking for residential users will park in this zone. This may also include working collaboratively with private entities in the area, such as churches, where shared parking can be implemented so the parking resources are used more efficiently and effectively.
10. Ensure that the parking code corresponds with the posted signs.
11. Note new time restrictions on page 16 on Lee/Bank.

### Other Thoughts and Observations



The 2-Hour parking signs are visible throughout all of downtown, so the time restrictions are well noted. We do not recommend paid parking for the City.



The parking signs for off-street are visible and look attractive. The signs are so attractive that they blend in too well with the surrounding architecture.



The “paseos” that exist off of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue provide really nice connectivity to the off-street parking lots.



For the streets that run perpendicular to Bank Street (such as Vine), we recommend no delineation of parking and no time restriction for these parking areas in Zone 3.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue/Moulton Street intersection is one of the busiest in the City – enforcement of parking along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Moulton Street, Johnston Street, and Grant Street is critical to ensure that visitors/customers can find a place to park in this active area.



Throughout all of downtown, we recommend that the on-street parking spaces be repainted with full length stripes running perpendicular to the curbs to better delineate the parking spaces.