



# CITY OF CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA CITY COUNCIL Staff Report

October 4, 2022  
EXTRAORDINARY BUSINESS

<b>TO:</b>	Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Chip Rerig, City Administrator
<b>APPROVED BY:</b>	Chip Rerig, City Administrator
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Receive a presentation on the Traffic Congestion Reduction & Parking Management Program, and provide staff with direction

## RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a presentation on the Traffic Congestion Reduction & Parking Management Program, and provide staff with direction.

## BACKGROUND/SUMMARY:

### BACKGROUND

Carmel-by-the-Sea, like many other premiere destinations, struggles to balance tourism access and the needs of permanent residents. This balance includes traffic congestion challenges and providing sufficient short term parking options. Public discourse on traffic congestion, parking, and the effects of tourism on the long-standing ideal of maintaining residential character is a recurring theme dating back many decades. Major parking-related inflection points during the last 10 years include:

- March, 2021: City Council defined traffic congestion and parking a City priority
- December, 2014 to July, 2015: Pilot kiosk deployment on Ocean between Junipero and Monte Verde.
- November, 2013: Walker parking study (built upon a similar 1999 Walker Study)

### DISCUSSION

This section outlines key aspects of the issues which may be of value for the City Council to lead the community forward. To be certain, traffic congestion and parking is controversial, complex, and difficult to address given strong community feelings. Previous actions to influence change have been short-lived followed by long periods of time where traffic congestion and limited parking is re-acknowledged as a serious issue. Particularly in the last decade, gradually increasing awareness and a sense of responsibility for the environment adds more weight to the need to do something.

#### Traffic Congestion and Its Relationship to Limited Parking

Limited parking and parking time limits adds to vehicle movement and congestion within the business district in two major ways:

- (1) Those arriving in the area must circle the area near their destination in an effort to find a parking space. While differing by day and time, circling the area in search of a parking space for 10 or more minutes is not unusual.
- (2) Parking time limits require visitors and business employees/owners to frequently move their car to avoid time violations. Moving a parked car often involves making numerous passes in the business district before finding a new parking place.

#### Effects on Residents, Visitors and Businesses

Traffic congestion and accompanying air/noise pollution directly negatively impacts quality of life and Carmel's historic residential village character. The parking/quality of life balance has been explored numerous times, as outlined in this report.

In each prior analysis, some in the business community have opposed paid parking, citing inconvenience to potential customers and the economic impact of visitors shortening visits based upon the existence of paid parking. Conversely, prospective customers have indicated that the search for finding parking (especially on weekends) has motivated selection of another shopping/dining destination. Feedback indicates residents also frequently avoid the business district, because it is impacted by traffic congestion and parking challenges. Parking access and related traffic generates congestion and impacts pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

As paid parking options are adopted, it is possible some visitors may decide to shop elsewhere, to avoid the cost of parking. However, this small set of visitors would likely be offset by residents and visitors encouraged by additional parking availability. The current 2-hour time parking limitation, albeit free, currently negatively impacts local businesses when residents and visiting customers

manage their downtown experience within two-hour blocks of parking access. There are viable options, that have worked successfully for other jurisdictions. For example, smart phone options allow payment for additional time when needed to facilitate pleasant, worry-free shopping or dining.

Pay for parking can be linked with a resident permit program to allow Carmel residents free and convenient parking in pay-by-app areas utilizing a license plate registration process. We anticipate this will encourage residents to experience downtown without the current parking limitations.

Finally, a comprehensive management program that includes paid parking in the business district could provide an option for employee parking, which also impacts visitor and resident “drive around time” when employees reposition vehicles every two hours to avoid citation.

### **2014/15 Parking Experiment**

Paid parking on Ocean Avenue, adopted in 2014, positively impacted availability. However, the program also generated “spillover” impacts in nearby free parking areas. While staff indicated the program met stated goals, community outcry, mostly regarding appearance of paid parking kiosks, led the City to abandon this paid parking initiative.

As an alternative to paid parking, some business leaders committed to self-monitoring employees parking impacts. Anecdotal evidence indicates this has not positively impacted parking availability. Additionally, some have suggested employees, who repeatedly exceed the two-hour limitation should be more severely impacted with higher fines and fees. Differentiating the use of a public parking space is legally and operationally challenging.

Community sentiment and program details about the 2014/15 parking program, is best derived by reading the following Carmel Pine Cone Articles and Editorials (ATTACHMENT 1):

- “Parking Workshop Set for Thursday” (10/17/2014)
- “Paid Parking Kiosks to Arrive on Ocean Avenue” (11/14/2014)
- “Metered Parking to Go Live Dec. 1” (11/28/2014)
- “Give the Kiosks a Chance” (Editorial, 11/28/2014)
- “Ambassadors Hit the Streets as Paid Parking Begins” (12/5/2014)
- “Paid Parking now Starts at 10 a.m.” (1/23/2015)
- “More Free Parking on Ocean Avenue for Residents” (4/10/2015)
- “You can have your own opinions, but...” (Editorial, 5/1/2015)
- “Chief: Parking Vouchers are not for Workers” (5/15/2015)
- “Paid Parking a Success, Chief will Tell Workshop Wednesday” (6/19/2015)
- “Paid Parking Results Don’t Sway Vocal Opponents” (6/26/2015)
- “Parking kiosks on the way out” (7/3/2015)
- “No Need to Go Back to Square One” (Editorial, 7/3/2015)
- “Council Wants Parking Kiosks Gone by Aug. 1” (7/10/2015)
- “Kiosks gone, two-hour limit back on Ocean” (7/31/2015)

### **Community and operational concerns with the 2014/15 Parking Program**

While the City’s previous attempt to address parking and traffic flow in the downtown was based upon thoughtful analysis and deliberation, it ultimately was abandoned for the reasons outlined herein. Evaluating past experiences should be considered when developing new parking options.

Review of local news and letters to the editor regarding the 2014/2015 Ocean Avenue program points to a few key issues which likely led to the failure of the program.

First, the number (one per block), aesthetics, and visual impact of parking payment kiosks did not meet the needs of many residents. However, as discussed in one editorial, residents might be inclined criticize appearance as a reason to oppose the program when a more visceral concern was actually paying for a community asset that was formerly offered at no cost.

Second, critics cited the inconvenience of making payment expressed primarily by business leaders who were concerned potential patrons would go elsewhere to avoid this inconvenience.

Third, people in opposition cited the “Carmel way” or keeping with tradition where locals guard and protect the quaint residential village feel. Some felt paid parking and its accompanying kiosks or meters serve to symbolize the opposite.

Fourth, late recognition of need to “take care” of employees, locals, and businesses. Rather deep into the Ocean Avenue rollout, the City made adjustments to time restrictions (for permit holders), expanded free parking areas, and offering businesses free parking vouchers. These efforts appear to have been adopted too late as momentum against the overall program had already taken root.

Fifth, the timing of the rollout was problematic. Adding paid parking as the business district entered the holiday season introduced extra complexity. Perhaps starting during a lower use period would have made some small difference.

Lastly, there were instances where the “if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it” perspective was expressed by those dissatisfied with paid parking. Here, it appears as though some in the community have concluded that finding a parking space and traffic congestion is not a

problem. This is an understandable perspective, especially among locals who choose to venture into the business district only during low-use times or not at all. Businesses which are doing well, are also understandably inclined to not want change for fear of some unknown financial impact.

### **Walker Studies (summarization)**

In 1999 and again in 2013, the City hired Walker Parking Consultants to conduct parking studies in the business district area (ATTACHMENTS 2 AND 3). The information from both studies is consistent, for example both studies describe:

- On-street parking in the business district has very high occupancy leading to visitor frustration
- Employees and business owners adding to the high occupancy and thereby exacerbate the problem
- Comparison cities and their rates/policies

The 1999 report includes extensive revenue projection data (total revenue of over \$2 million) and this information is not included in the 2013 report.

#### Key quotes from the 2013 study:

*Parking challenges are more of an issue of imbalance of parking demand rather than a shortage of spaces.*

*The overall, peak occupancy rate of the parking system in Downtown Carmel is among the highest we have observed...throughout California.*

*While the aesthetic requirements of the City may make the implementation of paid parking more challenging than in other cities, new technologies could help mitigate the impact.*

*Current parking occupancy conditions suggests that during busy periods, visitors are likely to have difficulty in finding an available parking space...resulting in a significant amount of traffic generated by visitors not driving to their destination but instead searching for an on-street parking space.*

*Based on our studies and experience, implementation of paid parking would reduce visitor frustration and traffic congestion.*

*During the busiest times in Carmel's business district, a significant number of the parking spaces specifically designed for use by visitors are likely occupied by employees.*

*Having a significant number of visitor spaces occupied by long-term parkers is a common and vexing problem for popular commercial districts in California that attempt to manage parking demand solely using time restrictions.*

*The biggest issue is not a lack of parking spaces but an uneven distribution of the demand for parking spaces between on-street spaces (for which there is high demand) and off-street spaces (for which there is lower demand).*

*Despite frequent perceptions to the contrary, paid parking should be viewed as the most efficient way, and usually the only efficient way, to manage and allocate parking demand.*

### **Parking data (source: 2013 Walker Report)**

Spaces by Location and Control (in Business District)	Spaces	% Total
On Street	1511	78%
Off-Street City Controlled*	312	16%
Off-Street Private (but available to the public)**	106	5%

\*Includes Vista Lobos, Sunset Center, City Hall, Harrison Park Branch Library, and Post Office parking lots

\*\*Carmel Plaza

The 1,511 on-street parking spaces break down as follows:

- 794 2-hour spaces
- 506 spaces with no limit
- 128 30-minute spaces
- 26 loading spaces
- 39 other spaces (e.g., library patrons, ADA spaces, buses, etc.)

The City Administrator, Police Chief, and Planning Director have reviewed the Walker Reports and concur there is no reason to update or conduct another parking study. The reason for this assertion: current economic data suggests that the amount of visitors has remained strong and, functionally, the streets, number of businesses, traffic patterns, etc., have remained the same. The only change is an increase in amount of visitors. Lastly, funding another study would represent a waste of public money when the outcome of such a study is already known by staff and community leaders.

### **Reasons to Reengage**

In the nearly eight years since the abandoned paid parking experiment of 2014/15, the problems associated with traffic congestion and limited parking in prime parking areas have continued to negatively impact the community. While definitely a “hot button” issue, sure to evoke strong feelings, enough time has passed to reflect on past program shortcomings, consider how technological advances might be able to help, and make changes to better address the criticisms of the past.

A continuing theme, lasting decades, has included the cat-and-mouse game used by employees to park in the free and convenient on-street parking. As described in the Walker report, enforcement of limited time zones is “vexing” for many communities. Employees running to their car to move when a parking enforcement officer “rounds the corner” is now common. Actual, results-oriented control of the employee parking problem by well-meaning business management is inconsistent at best. Business leaders have little ability to actually verify if an employee is parked properly or just parked in front of another nearby business.

The overarching problem with the 2014/15 parking program centered on kiosks and their mismatch with our aesthetics. New technology is smaller and may allow for many fewer or zero kiosks. In 2014, the pay-by-phone option required a cumbersome app download. Now, no download is needed. Current and proven technology allows for motorists to simply take a picture of a “Q code” and then be taken to a web connection where parking duration, license plate, and payment is accomplished. With COVID, touchless food ordering via a Q-Code was commonplace. Society is now much more accustomed with this concept and paying for parking can now be accomplished in the same way.

Technology also now allows for local businesses or innkeepers, who are concerned about convenience for their VIP customers, to enter and pay for parking on their customer’s behalf—all they will need is a license number.

## **CITY COUNCIL DIRECTION - NEXT STEPS**

In response to the current City Council priorities, staff needs clarification in the form of consensus for next steps.

### **Question 1: Timing of community outreach**

The next phase to advance the parking/traffic congestion issue includes a series of public outreach efforts. This public engagement is needed to thoroughly explain the need for paid parking and to design a program which is well-planned and meets the public’s expectations.

Sample public outreach timeline is attached (ATTACHMENT 5).

Question 1 Options:

1. Start immediately, expedite to get an action item to current City Council on December 6, 2022
2. Start public engagement activities in January, after the new City Council is seated, with plan to bring back an action item in May, 2023
3. Wait and seek direction from new City Council in 2023
4. Other options as directed by Council

### **Question 2:**

As outlined in the attached “Draft Community Engagement Plan” (ATTACHMENT 4), a variety of public outreach efforts are being proposed, to include (1) informational mailing, (2) resident meetings, (3) business meetings, (4) farmers market booth, (5) restaurant/innkeepers meeting, (6) Planning Commission meeting, and a (7) City Council workshop.

Question 2 Options:

1. Consensus on the draft engagement plan
2. Modifications as needed
3. No action—present the question to future

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

### **FY 2022/23**

This year’s financial impact is dependent City Council’s decision to move forward with the public outreach and parking program advancements during this fiscal year. If staff are assigned to undertake this work, there will be minimal FY 2022/23 impacts (less than \$1,000 dollars for mailouts and presentation material). However, if there is a desire to use outside consultant services for this work, costs for FY 2022/23 could be significant (specific amount would need to be derived later as part of a separate action item to City Council).

### **Long term**

The 1999 Walker Report (ATTACHMENT 2), projected gross revenue in excess of \$2 Million per year. This projection was based on revenue from 1,049 paid parking spaces at \$1/hr. A more recent projection suggests a smaller paid parking area consisting of about 718 parking spaces at \$2/h would generate gross revenue of about \$2.1 million dollars (this was based on occupancy percentages of Pacific Grove and Monterey). Community benefit from such revenue would be determined/defined by future City Councils.

**PRIOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION:**

- (1) Approved staffing Community Service Officer positions (from 1970's, between one and five positions)
- (2) Funded two parking studies (1999 and 2013)
- (3) Approved experimental, 6 month paid parking program (2014/15) and a 2002 "pay and display" program
- (4) Established and adjusted 2 hour and 20-minute parking zones (multiple adjustments over time)
- (5) Established free, all-day parking at Sunset Center
- (6) Expanded all-day parking on Junipero Avenue
- (7) Included addressing parking/congestion as a City Council Priority/Goal on numerous occasions

**ATTACHMENTS:**

[Attachment 1\) Pine Cone Information](#)

[Attachment 2\) 1999 Walker Parking Consultants Report](#)

[Attachment 3\) 2013 Walker Parking Consultants Report](#)

[Attachment 4\) Draft Community Engagement Plan](#)

[Attachment 5\) Sample Public Outreach Timeline](#)