

Stakeholder Interview Summary

City of Bainbridge Island Downtown Parking Strategy

Introduction

As part of the Bainbridge Island Downtown Parking Strategy, Framework interviewed stakeholders representing a range of perspectives about their experiences and perceptions about parking Downtown, strategies to improve parking, and how parking can support the City's vision for Downtown. The Multi-Modal Transportation Advisory Committee was engaged and a total of eleven stakeholders were interviewed, including city staff, residents, business owners, and employees.

The stakeholders expressed consistent viewpoints on the need to proactively address parking in Downtown. Stakeholders also see a larger connection between the quality of the experience in Downtown, the tourist economy, and parking issues that occur.

Stakeholder comments were received from the following individuals/groups:

- Lisa Wangen / *Downtown Business Owner*
- Karen Brubeck / *Downtown Resident*
- Tami Allen / *Bainbridge Island Harbormaster*
- Ken Lundgren / *Parking Enforcement Officer*
- Perry Barret / *Bainbridge Island Parks & Recreation District*
- Jeff Ozimek / *Bainbridge Island Parks & Recreation District*
- Michael Rosenthal / *Downtown Business Owner*
- Bainbridge Island Multimodal Transportation Advisory Committee
- Kevin Dwyer / *Go! Bainbridge/Sustainable Bainbridge* (emailed comments)
- Ross Hathaway / *Squeaky Wheels* (emailed comments)
- Larry Nakata / *Downtown Business Owner*
- Phedra Eliot / *Housing Resource Board*
- Korum Bischoff / *Bainbridge Island Museum of Art*



Questions

The following questions were used to guide the discussions with stakeholders.

1. What are the biggest parking challenges that you encounter in Winslow? Can you give any examples?
2. Who is the most impacted by the parking challenges?
3. If nothing were to change in the parking system, what do you think would happen?

4. What solutions do you think would address these challenges? What does success look like?
5. How do you see parking fitting into an overall plan for Downtown Bainbridge Island? Is it important to you that the City invest in constructing additional parking Downtown?
6. Is there anything we didn't discuss?

Summary of Key Themes

Comments by the interviewees are summarized into themes within the following section. A selection of comments by the interviewees are listed under each theme to provide a sampling of what was heard during the discussions.

Parking + Future Growth

Stakeholders see Bainbridge Island as a changing community due to increases in the island population and visitor counts resulting from regional growth and proximity to Seattle. As the City grows, there will be a need to accommodate more people, vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

- We need more parking – the population growing and becoming more of a tourist destination for day trips. We need to embrace this growth and plan for it.
- If additional structured parking is created it is very expensive and should be provided at the ferry terminal not downtown to minimize traffic impacts and maximize value. A very attractive pedestrian connection from the Terminal to Downtown is critical for many reasons.
- A parking garage makes a ton of sense. We can't plan for just non-motorized, it won't work. Paid parking wouldn't work in a garage on Bainbridge, but the garage needs to be paid for somehow. Many will say that the businesses should be the ones to pay for the garage, but a thriving Downtown benefits everyone.
- The parking issue / Town Square project should be decoupled from a non-motorized bond issue. This is a long-term issue that requires an in-depth look into what the plan for Winslow including retail/residential mix, business focus (appeal to tourism?), building height, traffic flow, etc. This will require at least a year of hard work.
- A parking structure could definitely help if it were in the right location and was designed well.
- Garage would be tough. A public/private endeavor would be better. There hasn't been enough community conversation to allow that to happen, though. If we could wave a wand and have it happen, it would be a good investment assuming that the garage could at some point be converted to something else in future and designed to accommodate that - parking lots won't always be as relevant.
- Community needs to decide how much/whether or not they value the Downtown. So many main streets become wastelands. We need to be more mindful. Winslow gives the island some character - is that important to people that live on Bainbridge? The reason (my business) stays Downtown is because I like to be a part of the community. Downtown is challenging to operate a business in but still valuable place to do it. A vital, unique Downtown important to any community.
- A parking garage may be a good revenue generator for the City if you charge for it. If they build a parking garage then we might as well put some housing on it.
- Summer is the worst time for parking, but, due to growth parking has become more of an issue over time and it's a year-round issue.
- The project should assume the goal is to provide space for City employees, some business employees, as well as visitors.

"Bainbridge is only going to continue to grow, and for the City to grow and for it to work there needs to be more parking."

Parking Experience

Many stakeholders think that there isn't enough parking in the area, others described additional parking experience challenges, such as traffic flow and parking restrictions, and some felt the issue is more of a perception problem.

- The parking is not good, there's barely capacity enough for the businesses and their employees.
- Perception is sometimes the reality, but a number of people stay away from the core on weekends because they perceive parking to be a challenge. Accessibility is such an important thing for businesses and services that are offered downtown
- Weekends are the worst for parking.
- There is a perception that there are no options.
- Many people just won't come downtown because they don't think they'll be able to find a space – exaggerated in the summer, but it's a year-round issue. Downtown is the heart and soul but people can't access easily.
- The south side of Winslow Way seems to be providing a lot of parking (off-street) for Downtown, but the north side doesn't have much.
- There are just more cars than there are spaces – just like any other city. You want to have a pretty Downtown, but adding parking lessens the number of spaces because parking is not pretty.
- People who live and work in Downtown know where to go and generally don't have to circle, there are spots available. Don't have enough guest parking for our customers, though, and lunchtime is the worst part of the day. Summertime also feels like anytime is bad for parking.
- Employees and people trying to get downtown to do business are the most impacted by the issue. Tourists are generally walking on so not as impacted.
- Parking is not a detriment, we're crowded but it's working - can almost always find a spot where I'm trying to go.
- Parking near City Hall is harder than parking Downtown on Winslow Way.
- Patrons walk off ferry, or park using publicly available spaces. Hear from daily visitors that couldn't find parking or that the spots are twenty minutes only. Encourage patrons to carpool etc.
- Lunch hour is the worst for finding parking both on weekends and weekdays.
- Even if you have an employee permit, if you're not there by 10 AM there won't be any space available.
- There used to be a peak in the middle of the day and then it was quiet after five but now there's a second peak around dinner time, which isn't as busy as the middle of the day.

Parking Logistics and Circulation

Events, a seasonal tourist economy, and ferry commuter patterns cause parking conflicts. In addition, Downtown is popular for many modes of travel for different purposes throughout the day, including cars, pedestrians, bicyclists, and ferries. This leads to times where the parking supply does not seem sufficient.

“Currently, we are managing frustratingly and spending a lot of time managing spillover parking.”

- Businesses are having to frequently manage their own lot enforcement as many people violate the private restrictions (such as customer parking only).
- Circulation is challenging.
- Conflict between vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists on Winslow when it's very busy.
- Biking feels very unsafe on Bainbridge Island, which is a barrier to more people using alternate modes.
- The ferry area should be included – it is an important piece of the Downtown parking system.

- There is a significant amount of underutilized surface parking in Winslow that could be more efficiently utilized: Church parking lot is empty most of the time, boat trailer parking (having a launch in the downtown park is both inefficient and dangerous; even with the DNR requirement it is appropriate to move it out of Downtown), employee parking at City Hall should be open to the public, unused side street parking that is prohibited from longer term parking should be. Open, metered parking should be used for Downtown.
- Grow is a wide ROW with room for on-street parking that would be less costly.
- Ingress and egress traffic to the currently considered parking facility location would create significant traffic problems and hazards for pedestrians.
- Winslow Way should be revised to use back-in angle parking which is much safer for everyone.
- 3-hour parking downtown seems quite generous. People are going to resort to whatever they are allowed to do to make it work for them. Business owners are parking right in front of businesses and there should be better solutions for long-term parking.
- There are traffic flow issues. The ferry terminal and light is timed for ferry unloading to happen fast but this backs cars up along Winslow Way in both directions and then people can't back out of their spaces, and it all spirals.
- In the Wing Point area ferry commuters are parking on-street and walking to the ferry. Doesn't seem to be a huge issue but it's happening. The spaces where they're parking, it seems legal.

Employee Parking Challenges

Employees don't have many options for long-term parking and the demand for on-street space by both long-term and short-term users is in conflict.

- Employees don't have a lot of options.
- Employee permit areas are limited and seem to always be full.
- Wyatt has its own residences and businesses and they are frustrated by the spillover parking from Downtown employees.
- The 4-hour parking on Wyatt is not very well used.
- Some businesses have had to come up with their own solutions for providing off-site employee parking, including through buying employees on-street employee permits through the city, leasing off-site parking lots, and working with other businesses on their own shared parking arrangements.
- Employees are coming from all over, many from off-island and their only option is to drive since the alternatives (walking, biking, public transit) are not viable for most employees given routes, schedules, and travel distances.
- Businesses advertise the available options for parking off-site to their employees and customers through newsletters, internal communications, etc.
- Encourage employees to use the bus system and coordinate with Kitsap Transit for some options that could make sense for employees would be big. We should subsidize those costs for employees, and hope 25% of employees could take the bus Downtown.
- Employees will use the three and four-hour spaces and move their cars even if they have a permit because the employee permit spaces are full. We (employers) discourage this but sometimes it's their only option, especially depending on what time of the day their shift starts. Employers are pretty hard on their employees about parking on Winslow Way.

"Employees have parking permits but often the employee parking is full by the 10 AM...Retailers are pretty hard on their employees about parking on Winslow Way"

Ferry Parking Challenges

There are conflicts between the demand for ferry parking and availability of space. Some users are parking in short-term on-street space and leaving their vehicles long-term while taking the ferry to Seattle.

- Although it has gotten better since the parking by the Senior Center has changed from 4-hour to 2-hour, there are some who will park at the Senior Center for the ferry and stay long-term.
- Have a lot of issues around the ferry during big events in Seattle. People are parking on-street in the 3-hour and 4-hour areas and extending their stay, as well as in unrestricted areas in residential neighborhoods, such as Ferncliffe.

High Activity Waterfront Park

The Waterfront Park has demand for short-term parking from a range of users, including recreation users, residents, and seniors.

- Year-round user groups include boat launch users, open-water marina residents, year-round sailing programs, the Senior Center, car-top boat launch users, park and playground users, and Bainbridge Island Rowing, Exotic Aquatics (kayak tours), Olympic Outdoor Center (kayak and paddleboard programs), and Bainbridge Island Parks and Recreation District programs.
- Available parking at the park includes 5-trailer spots, 2-hour angled parking by the Senior Center, one ADA space, and one 20-minute load space.
- Could use more bike parking and some motorcycle parking.
- Angled 2-hour parking by the Senior Center is always full as there are users from 4:30 AM until the end of the day.
- November through February is the only lull in Waterfront usage.

Trailer Parking on Bjune in Conflict with Demand for Downtown Parking

The north Side of Bjune adjacent to Town and Country and the Waterfront Park and the north and south sides of Bjune between Madison Avenue and Shannon Drive are reserved for trailer and cartop boat launch vehicles during all weekends and holidays. The City, as part of a 1985 agreement with the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), is required to reserve the 15 boat-trailer combo stalls on Bjune regardless of the boating season, demand, or occupancy. This agreement was based on RCO grant funding provided to the City to build the dock and ramp. The cost to park in these spaces and use the waterfront during weekends and holidays is \$80 annually for trailer-vehicle combos, \$8 per day for trailer-vehicle combos, and \$5 per day for cartop vehicles.

- The spaces are reserved for trailer-truck combo and cartop boat vehicles exclusively during weekend and holidays.
- People seem to park in reserved spaces on weekends and holidays regardless.
- There is no parking available for the open-water marina users, although it seems to work out okay.
- Lots of bike traffic coming through the park on the Waterfront Trail from the ferry.
- Waterfront Park is the only launch ramp in the City so there needs to be some solution for parking trailers and cartop boater vehicles.
- Implementing paid parking permits has helped with encouraging people to follow the parking restrictions on Bjune. People are following the rules more.
- Trailer parking is due to a grant requirement but is there an option to revisit this? In the long-term, could the dock and/or launch be relocated so that it doesn't require parking/access?
- Is it possible that enough time has passed that the City has "paid its debt" on requiring trailer parking?

Off-Street Parking is Hard to Find and Poorly Signed

Many stakeholders feel that there are “go-to” spots where they know they can usually find parking but that these spaces aren’t easy to find if you don’t know where they are located. There is no coordinated signage about parking options are off of Winslow Way.

- Signage isn’t connecting people to the parking that is available.
- The Harbor Public House area is the hardest for finding parking. Not much on-street parking and the off-street all appears to be private and for specific uses.
- Signage is a problem – if you’re just visiting you would drive down Winslow and not know – you’re not there to drive around all day, you want to visit.
- Make it clearer what places are available for after hours parking through signage and informational materials. It’s unclear if people are allowed to park in some of the off-street lots during certain times of the day and on weekends.
- Direct tourist traffic to the ferry terminal parking lots instead of Winslow.

“Signage isn’t connecting people to the parking that is available.”

A Multi-Modal Downtown

There is a desire by many to ensure that Downtown is conducive to multi-modal travel. In order to do so, the parking system must work along-side other travel options.

- Sustainable Bainbridge has interest in maintaining and improving pedestrian access in and around any proposed Downtown parking areas.
- Good lighting and directional signs to protect walkers and bikers.
- Where possible, covered bike storage areas that might encourage City and Downtown business employees to ride to work versus using a car.
- Much more needs to be done to encourage people to ride a bike and walk to Downtown. Speed reduction, Core 40 bike lane shoulders, bike parking, promotions. Bikes and foot traffic (including ferry based tourist business focus?) means less demand for parking and more demand for a low-auto-traffic environment. Bikes rather than cars save money for the community and make the Island more marketable as a destination.
- Employees are not owed free parking. It is appropriate to encourage employees to use mass transit, park and rides, biking, walking, etc.
- Used to bike commute through Winslow, but it’s a little scary. With all the new planters, and the new street design, it’s hard for people to see you. For the most part it works okay but during certain times of the day it can be really crazy and unsafe.
- The park-and-ride solution is great but it can’t work for everyone, especially when a lot of your customers are older. People also want the ability to be independent.

“It is appropriate to encourage employees to use mass transit, park and rides, biking, walking, etc.”

Residential Parking Challenges

Residential parking in Downtown can be a challenge for those living in multi-family and mixed-use buildings. There aren’t many options for off-site overnight parking.

- Some work close and can walk. Others work close but they need parking because they have to shuttle kids, etc. It would be hard to go without a car completely.

- Some tenants and homeowners walk to jobs and utilize the trail system to get where they're going but these are largely able-bodied and younger people. Some older residents still need the car to get around.
- A Downtown resident stated that they were happy they can walk to do their errands and activities because otherwise there wouldn't be somewhere to park.
- Parking for residents can be a challenge when there are guests or family in town as there are very few off-site overnight options in the Downtown without restrictions. Most condos are limited to one parking space per condo.

Parking Required for New Development

Several stakeholders identified that the parking requirements on the Island for new development of certain use types doesn't seem sufficient given that Downtown is growing.

- Bainbridge Island wants to be a work/live environment but parking and transportation are one of the largest costs to a family or individual so how will minimum parking requirements affect the goals for a livable Downtown? What are the City's goals for Downtown residential?
- What is the give and take between building parking and other options for using that space?
- The City intentionally chose to not require development downtown to provide the normal level of additional parking per additional square foot of retail and residential space. Not appropriate to make the citizens pay for additional parking.
- I'm an advocate of thinking differently about parking and not requiring it. There's other ways, car-share, etc. It's very common to pay for a space other places.
- When condo complexes are being built or new buildings are going in, the City should require more parking – this seems like a natural solution – this could be utilized more.