

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant with news and commentary for Tuesday, December 17, 2024.

After several years of not developing a cohesive parking management plan for downtown Port Townsend, along with the general perception that downtown parking is getting progressively worse, the city is poised to address the situation in 2025. The problem is top of mind for anyone who drives downtown more than once a week, and often discourages us from making a trip in the first place, during peak times. According to a document presented to City Council in September there are four possible options, from a detailed \$145,000 study and implementation to letting things proceed without change after completion of the comprehensive plan next year. As with any such list, the final plan could cross-pollinate the options. And any such plan will allow for public input; in-person and online. The document includes the most recent parking inventory, listing 1,190 total spaces downtown. This includes 403 two-hour spaces, 29 four-hour spaces, 177 24-hour spaces, 24 disabled parking spaces, and 552 private spaces.

One notion is to build more parking, either by land acquisition or the construction of a parking structure. Cost aside, this isn't a good option, according to a retired former city planner. The more parking you build, the more you encourage a car-centric, car-dominant environment. If you build parking, you're telling people, "We want you to come here by car." Adding more parking often means you've got less space for other uses such as expanded sidewalks or bike lanes.

An existing option is offsite parking, a system that is already in place with the Hanes Place Park and Ride near Safeway, almost two miles from downtown. There's currently a shuttle that provides service to downtown and uptown every 30 minutes. This lacks the convenience of controlling your own parking destiny, but is offset by not having to search endlessly for an available time-restricted spot.

People notice a lack of parking when what's available exceeds their expectation of how far they should walk to their destination, with differing perceptions. Businesses will push for higher turnover spaces, where customers park, buy something, and drive away. Someone who finishes a late-night restaurant shift won't like having to walk a distance to their car. An office employee will want to park nearby for an extended time period.

Parking enforcement is also a dodgy subject in Port Townsend. Most downtown spots post a two-hour limit, but that is ignored as much as it is followed. The lack of enforcement is a personnel issue, with the hiring of an enforcement officer or two on the police department's to-do list. One can choose to pay \$20 to park in the First Security Bank lot or at the Bishop Hotel, or exceed the limit and take their chances that they won't receive a \$15 ticket. This strategy will only work if the city decides to do nothing, for the time being. As parking enforcement is currently nonexistent, there is nothing to stop someone from spending eight hours in a two-hour space – other than the fact that it's pretty darn rude.

Another downtown game changer is the proposed construction of the 50 room Water Street Hotel a block away from the ferry dock. The zoning does not require new parking construction, but merchants are concerned that failing to do so will add stress to an already critical situation. And hotel guests require parking close to their accommodations.

The public has until 4pm December 31 to comment about the application (<https://cityofpt.us/planning/custom-contact-page/planning-contact-information>). This is an ongoing story, too complicated for coverage in a five-minute newscast. KPTZ will continue to update the situation as it develops.

KPTZ broadcasts local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through at news@kptz.org. I'm Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.