

To: City of Ann Arbor Transportation Commission
From: Kirk Westphal
Subject: Our Underused On-Street Parking System
Thursday, October 7, 2021

Dear Commissioners:

I'm writing to request the following:

- 1) Examine the currently unmetered, on-street parking system holistically, getting ahead of potential issues generated by increased residential construction and parking demand in new areas
- 2) Review the process for approving any expansion or addition of residential parking permit (RPP) districts, hopefully requiring review and a positive recommendation by the Commission, and
- 3) Substantially increase the pricing for the RPP and index it to city parking rates, until a more fair method of pricing on-street parking can be arranged.

In summary, it's my belief that the RPP works against the efficient use of the city's parking assets, privileges already privileged residents, forces more driving, increases demand for costly parking structures, and—if it continues to expand as more of the city urbanizes—will continue to be a lose-lose proposition for workers, employers, VMT, emissions, and vulnerable road users.

Background

I estimate that we have at least 1,000 on-street public parking spaces sitting empty on a daily basis in the city limits—all within minutes of our highest-demand destinations via walking and/or the AAATA. For this reason, I'm not in favor of constructing more parking anywhere, except perhaps at new park and ride facilities.

For example, see the attached map showing how much of the city—and therefore how many unused on-street parking spots—are within a 20-minute walk + AAATA ride of the Ann/Ashley parking structure. I picked this location because it is where the DDA proposed adding a couple hundred parking spots at an unheard-of price. (Map generated by mapnificent.net.)

RPP

Most of these on-street spots are free for anyone to use, but an increasing number of them are effectively "owned" by residents next to them thanks to the RPP program.

I assume the RPP was founded based on the antiquated notion that everyone should have a car, and people living in houses near downtown that don't have driveways or garages all need cars and should have exclusive, low-cost rights to the on-street parking spaces in front of their houses.

Of course, we know now that many downtown residents walk, bus, use wheelchairs, or bike to their daily destinations, but use their RPP as a cheap way to store their cars for extended periods on public property (for days or weeks without moving) except for the rare occasions they need it. Right now,

landlords advertise houses as "eligible for the RPP," therefore inviting potential renters to bring their cars.

Since then, the RPP program has expanded to otherwise quiet residential areas to "defend" people's (mostly homeowners') rights to virtually free, exclusive use of city streets in front of their property (see map).

Where RPP is now

I think it's ridiculous that we're charging only \$64 per YEAR for on-street parking. (I see that it was changed in July—hopefully increased and not decreased.) If these areas are in high demand, why not meter them? Or at least double the rates? (Could the annual rates be pegged to some multiple of the current monthly city permit rates for structures or 100x the price of hourly parking rates, which is also far too low? Raising it to \$120/year equates to 6 cents/hour for 2000 working hours/year.) This is a parking subsidy.

I also find [this language](#) below from the city's website objectionable:

Program Overview

RPPs were designated primarily for residential areas where there is a scarcity of convenient off-street parking for residents, where **the majority of legal on-street parking spaces are utilized by commuters and non-residents**, and where residents are experiencing traffic, noise, and safety problems.

The RPP seeks to alleviate a common set of **problems found in cities with residential neighborhoods close to non-residential developments such as offices, stores, hospitals, restaurants, schools, and major transit routes**.

Is it really a "problem" that people get to live near jobs and other amenities and (for homeowners) reap the higher property values because of it? Why shouldn't other people be able to use empty on-street parking as a park and ride for the AAATA, for example? Virtually all of the folks in these districts have garages and driveways. (I believe there are parallel parking spots on Huron Parkway, just north of Plymouth, that even have signs promoting them as "Park and Ride." Why shouldn't this be the case one block over?)

It's a major benefit, not a problem, to be near stores and transit—one that everyone should be able to share. But instead, we are discouraging the use of underutilized public on-street parking facilities through RPP districts... and at the same time the DDA has been asking to spend city tax revenue to construct more parking downtown, which will make commuters clog the streets, emit more carbon, and endanger vulnerable road users all the way downtown.

Moving forward

While I don't want more parking, I believe we should treat on-street parking that we already have as a city asset, one that...

1) helps local businesses with overflow parking

- 2) helps commuters (who can't afford to live here) to park and ride or walk
- 3) builds ridership and revenue for AAATA (even UM commuters who park and ride give money to the AAATA through use of their M Cards)
- 4) eliminates the need to construct downtown spaces
- 4) gets cars out of the city center.

Or maybe a lot of this on-street parking should be converted to separated bike lanes?

Instead, on-street parking is increasingly treated as a gift to people financially comfortable enough to live in prime city locations and reinforces the notion that they have special rights to the public road in front of their homes.

My apologies if this is already an issue that is being studied. While I am hopeful that imminent changes to zoning around the city will invite many more people into our city who want to live a car-light or car-free existence, there will inevitably be some auto use—including in areas where residents aren't accustomed to it. Other cities have "solved" the resulting conflicts by insisting on the construction of more off-street parking, which we all know is a fool's errand. I hope that your good work on this issue will get ahead of potential conflict and help prepare elected officials how to speak about on-street parking in a way that's healthy for the entire community.

As always, I'm happy to talk about this on the phone (734-660-9955), via email or in person.

Best,
Kirk

PS: I understand a case **could** be made for not providing free overflow parking on city roads to a non-taxpaying entity like the UM hospital. UM should be investing in heavier transit for its workers instead of constructing more expensive garages on prime real estate!



