

# PARKING IN DOWNTOWN WARSAW

*Right or Privilege?*

No

Record

A White Paper Project  
for  
Kosciusko Leadership Academy

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Kosciusko County has enjoyed strong and steady growth for a number of years. As we grow we experience both the benefits and the problems of an enlarging population base. The number of jobs and people increase, as does the number of vehicles vying for a place on our roads and in our parking areas. Certainly these kinds of problems would be the envy of many communities, but in Warsaw, they are concerns that need to be addressed.

In this paper I will assess the effect of a growing population on a static area. I will specifically address the issue of parking in the downtown Warsaw business district. This issue can be and has been emotionally charged. Certainly, employees of the downtown businesses would like to park as close to work as possible. Most employers and customers however, would prefer that those prime spots be left open. Data will be provided to enable us to effectively analyze the situation, determine the extent of the problem and, make recommendations if warranted.

Data for this project was collected from a number of sources. Jo Paczkowski works in downtown Warsaw and is a member of the Warsaw Traffic Safety Commission. Jo provided the initial assessment of the problem, access to the Traffic Safety Commission, and contacts for further information.

The director of the Warsaw Community Development Corporation (WCDC), Jane Scott, was an invaluable resource. Jane provided the results of a parking survey that had been recently sent to all downtown businesses. She also had a tremendous amount of information concerning the demographics of the downtown business district.

Captain Steve Foster, of the Warsaw Police Department, is directly involved with the issue due to his involvement as the chair of the Traffic Safety Commission. In addition, Captain Foster created a map of the downtown area showing all of the parking spaces available and how those spaces are regulated.

Additional information was provided by Warsaw City Planner, Tony Lucenko, and the Times-Union.

For the purposes of this study, the downtown Warsaw business district will be defined as an area bordered on the East by Detroit St. (St. Rd. 15); on the North by Fort Wayne Street; on the West by Washington Street; and on the South by Winona Avenue.

According to the WCDC there are nearly 100 business in the downtown area. These business employ approximately 900 full and part-time persons. Although no exact figures were available, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of these employees work days, Monday through Friday. It is during this period of time that the parking problem is most evident.

A copy of the map created by Captain Foster is attached to this paper. It seems to indicate a great number of parking spaces that may be used. However, a closer examination reveals that 500 of those spaces are two hour parking only. Certainly those spots seem unsuitable for an employee working from 8am to 5pm.

But a Times-Union article dated December 14, 1991, reported how some downtown employees do use these two hour spaces. According to Mary Lou Plummer, Warsaw Police Department parking attendant, many of the same vehicles have been observed using the two hour spaces day after day. Plummer estimated that

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up to 75% of the people who park in front of stores work in the downtown area. Plummer also stated that she knows some employees move their cars every two hours to avoid receiving a parking ticket. Some even resort to wiping off the chalks marks police put on car tires to determine if a vehicle has exceeded the two-hour time limit. Captain Foster corroborated this information, adding that some of these individuals will even roll their vehicles forward or back a couple of feet to make it appear the car has been moved from that space.

An often overlooked consideration is that of the downtown employee as consumer. A great many of the downtown workers also shop in the area. The convenience of having many shops and services within a three or four block area encourages frequent downtown spending. According to a study reported in the "Downtown Idea Exchange", December 15,1990, the majority of employees in a downtown district are also customers. 30% of these workers shop downtown once or more a week; 30% shop several times a month. Additionally, 42% of these workers eat lunch out three or more times a week; and 36% eat out one to three times a week. It is apparent that the downtown employees have a significant economic impact on the downtown business district.

There are, according to the map, about 85 spaces available for free parking.

There are some concerns surrounding these spots however. These spaces are several blocks from the majority of the downtown businesses. During bad weather, or when carrying heavy loads, those spaces are very inconvenient. Also, a number of the free spaces are in front of other businesses or private residences. This, then, can become inconvenient and unfair to those individuals.

Some downtown businesses provide parking for most or all of their employees. Individual spaces or entire lots are rented or owned by several of these organizations. For example, the Times-Union owns two lots that provide parking for all of their employees. United Telephone Service provides 80 spaces for its workers in a lot about two blocks from their building. First National Bank however, is not able to provide any parking for its nearly 150 employees. First National Bank is not alone in this dilemma, as many of the downtown merchants are in the same position. The most obvious reason is that the downtown area is landlocked, with very little room to expand in any direction. Those businesses that would like to provide parking just do not have many options available to them.

Since 1980 the population of Warsaw has grown from 10,647 to 11,860 in 1990. This represents a growth rate of nearly 11.4%. As Warsaw continues to grow there will be more and more people working and shopping in the downtown area.

According to Warsaw City Planner Tony Lucenko, an existing parking ordinance mandates that a business moving or planning to expand must also provide off-street parking for its employees. The reality of this, according to Lucenko and the Traffic Safety Committee, is that the ordinance is not often enforced because it is understood most of those business do not have any options available. In most cases, if this ordinance were strictly enforced, the business would be forced to move out of the downtown altogether. City officials do not want to place undue hardship on these merchants because they believe everyone benefits from a strong and vital downtown.

As the new Zimmer building nears completion, many have expressed concern as to how this will effect the parking issue. According to Lucenko and Jane Scott, Zimmer is providing sufficient parking for all its employees on its grounds. It is not believed this influx of people will have a significant impact on downtown parking. Further analysis might be necessary after the Zimmer building is occupied.

Two areas to be address in the future are: the impact of the proposed Central Park Development Area; and the effect of the proposed moving of the Library out of the downtown area. The new Central Park will ideally draw many visitors, but there is no way to know if this will also increase the traffic in the downtown area. By the same token, it is very difficult to determine how the present Library grounds

would be used should the Library move to its proposed new location. Either one of these factors has the potential for at least limited impact on the downtown situation.

In analyzing this information there are a number of factors and options to consider. I will address several of the individual concerns then discuss some possible solutions.

Some downtown employees feel the free parking is too far away from their place of work and requires too much walking. While it is desirable to park close to work, we often walk one or two city blocks in the parking lots at Wal-Mart, K-Mart or Warsaw High School. Parking in a mall lot will usually mean a two block walk just to get to the entrance and then many blocks of walking once inside. Those who have lived and worked in a larger city such as Chicago or Ft. Wayne know that it is common to walk many blocks to get to work or anywhere else in the city. Of course, one of the reasons we live in a smaller town like Warsaw is to avoid the hassles associated with big city life, however; it is important to note that our situation is not unique and is in many ways enviable.

One option we do not have downtown is sufficient leasable parking. Several



employees I spoke with said they would be quite interested in renting a parking space if it were available. Unfortunately, there are very few available spots in the downtown lots. The City of Warsaw has approximately 70 leasable spaces, most of which are taken. One option would be for Warsaw to add some rental spaces. As you can see from the map, the city has spaces at the lot on the corner of Lake and Jefferson and a row of spaces in the large city lot behind Kline's. By utilizing some of the present two-hour spaces in these lots the city could potentially add 35-50 more leased spots. These added spaces would enable more employees to have off-street parking as well as generating additional revenue for the city.

There is another option that has, according to the Traffic Safety Committee, been discussed off and on for a number of years. This option is expensive, but has great potential. A parking garage has often been considered as perhaps the ultimate answer. The large city lot behind Kline's has usually been thought to be the best, if not the only, site for the garage. The benefits of the garage are readily seen and potentially enormous. A well designed parking garage could handle the downtown parking problem very easily for years to come. The city could lease spots in the garage to cover maintenance costs and to pay off the cost of construction.

Obviously, one important consideration is the cost of such a project.

According to the monthly periodical "Parking", October, 1990, the cost of a parking garage can be substantial. For each parking space constructed at "grade" (ground level), the cost is approximately \$1,000. To go up one level, the cost soars to \$4,100 per space. Two levels would cost \$4,900 per space. So, in order to add a one level 100 car garage, the City would spend \$400,000 to one half million dollars. This would certainly provide enough parking but it seems the price would make this a difficult issue to pursue.

In summary, I believe that a more thorough study is needed before any drastic measures are taken. After the new Zimmer building has been occupied for at least a year, I propose a study be conducted to determine Zimmers effect on the downtown situation. Another factor to be considered is the potential move of the library and the future of its properties. Many new parking spaces could become available there depending on how that property is handled.

I believe individual merchants should become more involved with their own employees by encouraging them to find other places to park, make use of public transportation, carpool or some other method to reduce the employee use of the two-

hour parking spots. While downtown employees are often customers as well, if their use of scarce parking spaces prohibits customers from doing business downtown, everyone suffers.

While a new parking garage has great potential, the cost of a project of that magnitude seems, at this time, prohibitively expensive. If Warsaw and the downtown district continue to grow, then the parking garage might be a very good solution.

For the present, it appears that at least a stop-gap solution is needed. I believe the City can handle at least some of the problems by identifying some new leasable parking spaces. This would enable some employees to park closer to work without having to take the two-hour spaces and also allow the City some additional income.

This issue is one that can be debated very effectively from either side. However, I believe that until some of the changes coming to downtown Warsaw have been introduced and analyzed it would be premature to suggest any major and costly solutions.

DETROIT ST.



PARK



ZIMMER

LIBRARY  
63

HIGH  
26  
30  
12  
22

22

16  
13  
15

8

67  
32

JEFFERSON

130

INDIANA 19

13  
30  
22

13  
20  
6  
TIMES UNION

19  
114  
20

AMERICAN LEGION  
40  
9

FT. WAYNE ST.

17  
8  
4

MAIN 20  
COURTHOUSE SQUARE  
BUFFALO 26

CENTER 21  
23  
24

MARKET 18  
10  
18  
13

COUNTY JUSTICE PARKING  
80

10

LAKE 19  
10  
8  
24

28  
5

13

WASHINGTON

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