



CREATING COMMUNITY through STRATEGIC PARKING PLANNING

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“**T**he street is the river of life of the city, the place where we come together, the pathway to the center.” This quote by urban sociologist William H. Whyte serves as an inspiring reminder of the importance of bringing people together in their communities. Whether they are residents of urban, suburban or rural societies, people have an inherent need to connect with others on a social level. This should remind all of us as designers and planners of our responsibility to create these opportunities and consider the social connections in our planning and design projects.

While our chosen career paths as parking professionals may create some bias, we do truly believe that parking provides valuable opportunities to create vibrant and active people places, particularly when considered early enough in the planning process. On college campuses, dense urban communities, and downtown suburban “main streets,” parking is often a critical factor in determining the likelihood of residents and visitors to visit or frequent a particular destination. Whether parking is convenient, secure and welcoming is often a deciding factor in people’s decision where to go in their free time.

Plan Early for Project Success

Consider the issue of parking as early as possible in the master planning process to identify the most effective opportunities to integrate parking — now and in the future. Planners for universities, urban cities and local municipalities should give parking a high level of importance in the planning process, and work to locate it strategically in areas with significant activity. All too often, parking is left as an afterthought. Planners, developers and architects may have no other choice than to locate these important assets on the outskirts of development and activity. This can leave parking isolated and inconvenient and serve to discourage its use.

Parking can play an important role not only in encouraging more pedestrian movement at the street level, but also in sparking further development in surrounding areas. One of the most effective parking planning strategies is to incorporate mixed-use within the footprint of the structure, especially at the street level. Integrating the parking facility with retail, office space or even residential units is an effective and smart use of limited land parcels for development and redevelopment. This strategy can increase activity in the community, as well as architectural appeal and pedestrian scale for the structure, the streetscape and the entire block or neighborhood. Combined with the powerful impact of shared-use parking, this single strategy can generate additional turnover — and revenue — and magnify on the street activity.

This strategy, however, requires significant planning when the project originates to determine the most appropriate use and scale of mixed-use space, and to solicit interest from potential tenants and partners. Planners must work with their clients to identify the project vision, goals and opportunities for the particular site, bringing all prospective stakeholders on board.

Early engagement of stakeholders can reduce or even eliminate potential project delays, zoning conflicts and other challenges throughout the planning, design and construction process. Parking projects can polarize communities like few other building uses. This level of early engagement can serve to enlist stakeholders as project advocates — organizations and individuals who recognize the vision, value and long-term impact of a project. With a well-conceived and complementary mix of uses — appropriate to the particular context — this strategy will increase the likelihood of creating a more vibrant and successful project, development or community.

Strategic Parking Planning for Campuses

The Hamilton Square development in Philadelphia serves as a testament to the impact of strategic parking planning in an urban campus environment. Located in a once blighted and unsafe area in West Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania utilized the project to integrate parking and retail to create a more sustainable and attractive community to serve its students, as well as residents of the surrounding area.

The Hamilton Square project incorporated an 800-space parking structure with a grocery store located on the ground level. The project also featured a movie theater, a variety of retail stores, and café and restaurant space to enliven the public domain and create a renewed sense of community. The inclusion of the grocery store filled a critical need for student, local residents and businesses — creating a real connection to the city by providing a tangible benefit. The project proved a significant catalyst for revitalization in the area, and today serves as an exciting place of community on Penn's campus, with a bustling street and activity throughout the day and evening.

The Hamilton Square project is just one of many planning efforts implemented by the university to utilize available land effectively. The university's strategic planning efforts have helped to accomplish these goals, while creating more opportunities for open space, improving connections for pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles, and improving the quality of life and community for students, faculty, and neighbors.

Parking as the “Front Door”

The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) is working in Atlantic City, N.J., to enhance the city's “first impression” to visitors arriving from the Atlantic City Expressway. Planners of the development adjacent to an existing mixed-use shopping area are seeking to utilize parking to accommodate the thousands of visitors to the city each year, while creating more street-level activity.

The CRDA mixed-use parking structure will accommodate 1,200 parking spaces to serve casino patrons, as well as visitors to the adjacent shopping center. The garage will include 18,000 square feet of ground floor retail, as well as space for a parking office. The mixed-use facility will help to create a livelier atmosphere in this section of Atlantic City, while promoting further growth and development at this extremely high-profile location.

While the CRDA facility will help to encourage a more active and exciting atmosphere along the street, its design will include a number of features which will effectively complement the already vibrant environment of the surrounding area. The garage will include edge lighting and colored elevator core lighting, metal screening, and an LED digital billboard. The garage will also feature solar panels on the roof.

The CRDA mixed-use parking facility is an important step in the future growth and development of the city of Atlantic City. While the garage will provide the essential parking infrastructure to serve the area, the significant mixed-use space will help to draw in more businesses and contribute positively to the economic vitality of the surrounding community.



Hamilton Square: The Hamilton Square project for the University of Pennsylvania utilized the effective integration of parking and retail to create a more sustainable and attractive community to serve its students.

Building Density and Creating Synergy of Uses - Effective Parking Strategies Abroad

The need to utilize effective parking planning strategies that create community and activity is not exclusive to the United States. Communities across Europe, Asia and the Middle East face increasing traffic congestion, parking problems, and the resultant pollution, commuter times and distances, and general community disconnect.

The Municipality of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates faces a growing problem of parking shortages and increased traffic congestion. Located just 20 miles from Dubai, the city houses a significant number of residents who face extremely long commute times, and then are confronted with limited parking options when they do finally arrive. In the evening in particular, these conditions create parking and traffic chaos with little opportunity for relief or convenience.

However, the municipality is currently working to address these challenges by utilizing structured parking and mixed-use to create a live/work/play environment within the city itself. Building significant mixed-use parking assets in carefully selected locations will provide opportunities for businesses to locate in Sharjah, creating job opportunities for residents as well. When implemented, this strategy has significant potential to reduce vehicle miles traveled, commute times and congestion.

By transforming this primarily residential city into a more varied, walkable, urban environment, the city will leverage structured parking to drive economic development. Pedestrian friendly streetscapes and a variety of retail, shopping, dining, and convenience establishments will enhance the sense of community and

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place, and improve the quality of city life. Building density, applying shared-parking methods and integrating mixed-use through the strategic location of structured parking will

help create a vibrant and attractive environment, while bringing people together at gathering places and other destinations.

As parking planners and designers, we are all aware of the valuable opportunities that parking creates in development. Keeping in mind that “the street is the river of life,” we have a responsibility to utilize our parking planning expertise to contribute to the quality of life for those who utilize the projects we design. Parking is an effective tool for developing attractive destinations, while ultimately bringing people together to live, work and come together in community. ■

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Casino Reinvestment Development Authority mixed-use parking structure in Atlantic City.