

City of Novato
General Plan 2035 Policy White Paper



DOWNTOWN PARKING
JANUARY 2018



DOWNTOWN PARKING STUDY/WHITE PAPER SUMMARY

Public Perception/Survey Results

Of 400 survey invitations mailed to DNBA members in 2014, 35 were completed. Many respondents felt there is a lack of long-term parking in downtown Novato, and there are concerns about the distance between available public parking and businesses.

77 percent of respondents said their customers raise concern about a lack of available public parking in downtown Novato. The majority of respondents felt that acquisition and construction of more public surface lots or a parking structure is the best way to improve the availability and supply of public parking, and that such improvements should be funded by municipal bonds or another loan source secured by the City. Downtown property owners expressed opposition to an assessment district to fund parking operations and improvements.

119 residents responded to an on-line survey. Survey results indicate that customers perceive a lack of public parking in downtown Novato, as roughly half of respondents said they frequently have difficulty finding parking, which discourages them from visiting downtown Novato. The most popular options for improving the availability and/or supply of public parking were acquisition and construction of a surface parking lot(s) and acquisition and construction of a parking structure(s). There was no clear majority support for a particular funding mechanism for parking improvements in the Downtown; 26% of respondents support the use of meter revenues or revenue from another paid parking program and 25% indicating new parking facilities are not needed in Downtown.

The most common comment from customer respondents was dissatisfaction with the decision to remove some on-street parking on Grant Avenue in favor of trees (although in reality the number of spaces after the project were slightly increased due to shift from parallel parking to diagonal).

Inventory and Utilization

Public Parking:	
On-street spaces	1,101
Off-street space	96 (e.g. Zenk Lot)
Private Parking:	<u>1,680</u>
TOTAL	2,877

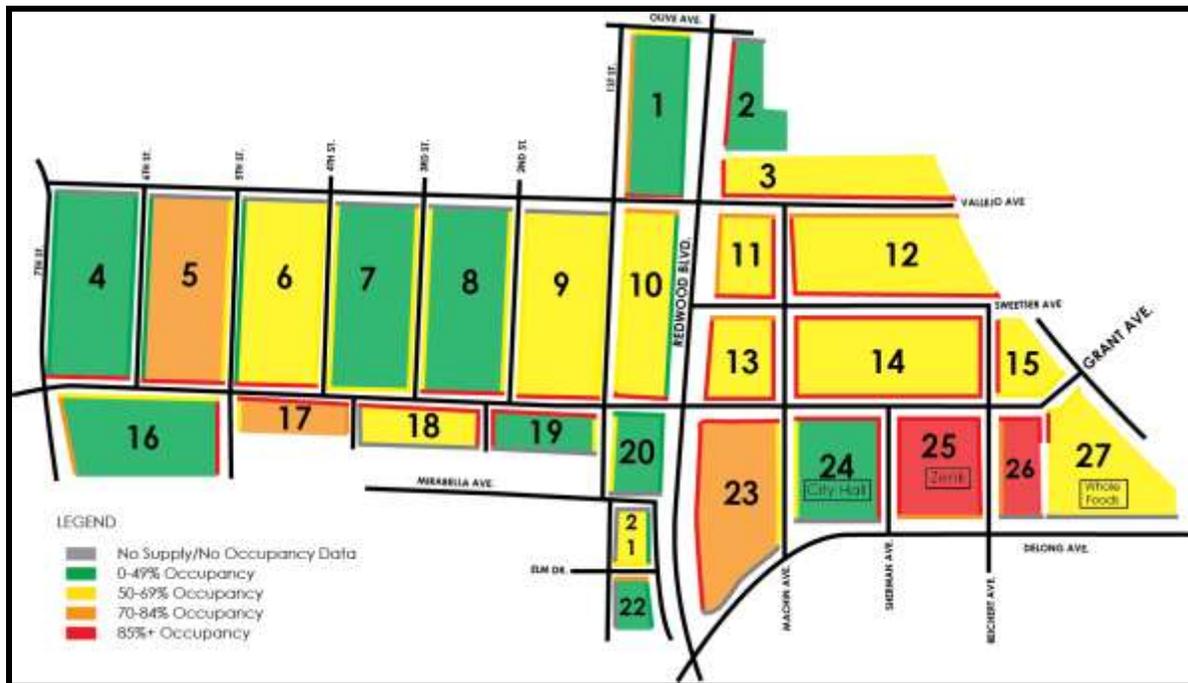
Utilization: Walker Associates defines “*effective supply*” (the point at which some vacant paces are available to prevent frustration or excessive circulation looking for parking) as being space occupancy *between 85 - 90%*.

Walker Study Utilization Data:

2014 Area Wide Peak Weekday Parking Occupancy

	Inventory	Demand	Occupancy Rate
On-Street Public	1101	810	74%
Off-Street Public	96	57	59%
Off-street Private	1680	928	55%

Figure 2: On- and Off-Street Parking Utilization – Weekday Peak

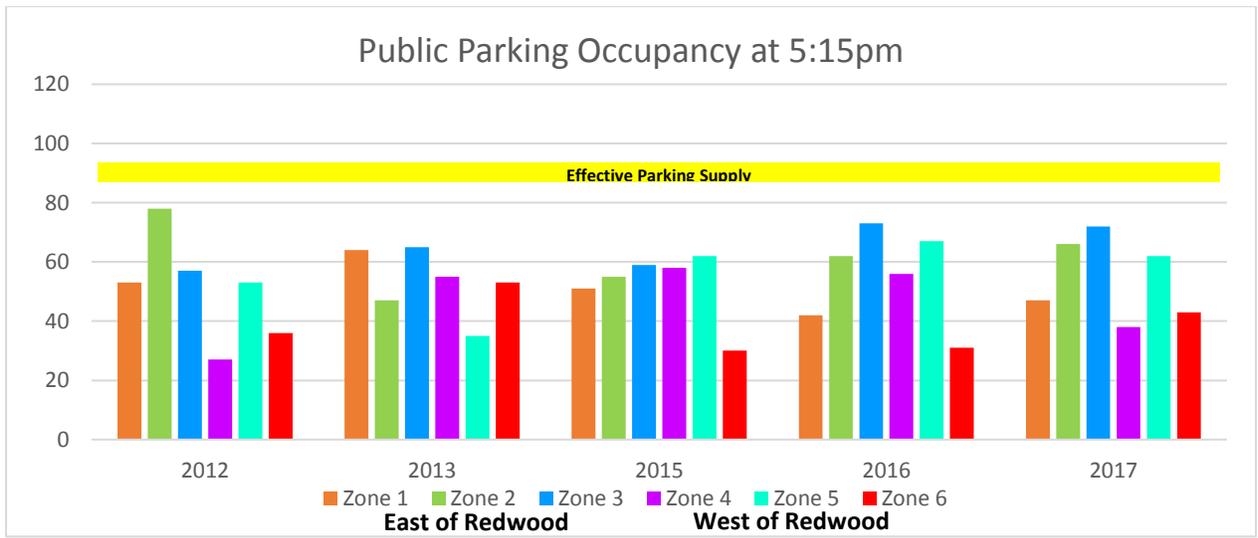
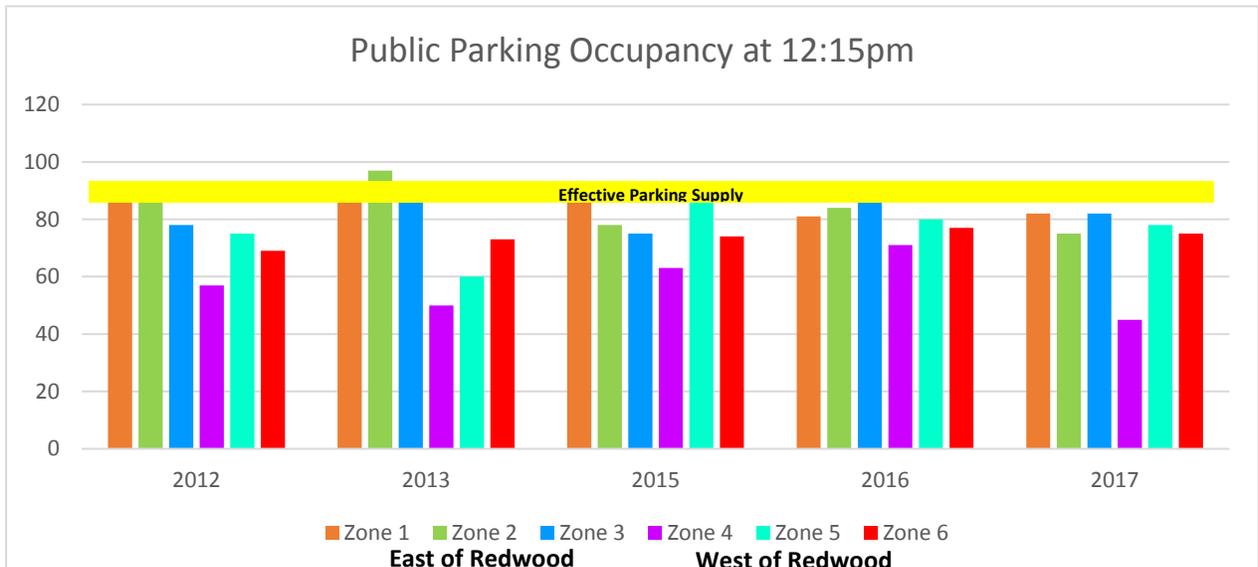


- Grant Avenue on both sides of Redwood Boulevard was over 85% utilized during the weekday noon peak hour, and in the highest activity area, between Machin Avenue and Reichert Avenue, peak utilization was over 90%.
- Public parking at the Zenk lot was found to be at capacity.
- Walker noted an area it identified as “Auto-Row” (Sweetser/Vallejo Avenues, due to the multitude of auto body and other auto related land uses parking for vehicles awaiting or having completed servicing) was over 95% utilized.
- Walker’s data indicates that private parking facilities throughout the downtown are significantly underutilized. Indeed, staff has observed a number private parking lots,

particularly those in the Old Town area, that are unusable for customer or employee parking due to deferred maintenance, the outdoor storage of materials, or the placement of barriers (fences, gates, etc.) precluding vehicle parking.

Annual City Parking Count Data:

In addition to the Walker parking counts from 2014, City staff conduct annual parking counts each fall. It should be noted that the annual staff parking survey is based upon a smaller area, more focused in proximity to Grant Avenue, than the Walker counts in 2014. Data from 2012 to 2017, excluding 2014 which Walker counted, indicate that public parking east of Redwood Boulevard is approaching capacity on weekdays during the noon hour. Parking is more available in the area west of Redwood. Parking is available throughout the downtown during evening hours.





Turnover and Enforcement

In general, most parking spaces on Grant Avenue are turning over in accordance with posted time limits. However, there is less turnover than posted limits allow on several of the north-south side streets east of Redwood Boulevard, particularly on Machin Avenue where over half of the 2-hour parking spaces were occupied by long-term parkers.

Enforcement of downtown parking time limits is done by Police Department interns sporadically. In 2014 an average of 19 hours were spent per month on parking enforcement, with an average of 28 citations issued.

Future Parking Demand

Planning staff and the consultants examined increased parking demand from reuse of 7 vacant sites (including reoccupancy/redevelopment of the former Pini Hardware building, the Community House and the vacant City homes on Sherman) and development of 4 vacant sites. Additional demand for parking without providing additional public parking or achieving better utilization of private parking spaces would exacerbate the existing, short-term parking shortages on Grant.

The City currently has a Zoning Code exemption allowing the decision-making body to waive on-site parking requirements for new or expanded commercial development up to a 1.0 floor area

ratio (FAR) in the Downtown Core provided that peak occupancy for public stalls remains below 90%. This exemption has been utilized four times: in the construction of the Umpqua Bank/Copperfield's building at 999 Grant Avenue (44 spaces waived), for Trek Winery at 1026 Machin (33 spaces waived), for the prior office use of 881 Grant (28 spaces waived) and for reoccupancy of the Novato Theater (71 spaces waived). A parking exemption has also been applied for by the proposed mixed use project at Grant and First Avenues.

However, on a total basis, Walker indicated there are enough on-street and public parking spaces within the downtown area as a whole to accommodate the projected increase in parking demand. However, without a shift to existing underutilized private off-street parking, visitors and employees would be parking as far away as 1st Street for uses east of Redwood Boulevard. Walker noted, at the very least, significant parking management and policy efforts would need to take place to shift current and future parking into the Mill Works garage and City Hall public parking areas and to underutilized private lots from other locations and/or constructing additional public parking in Downtown.

Impacts of future new development on parking are exacerbated by the City's existing parking waiver policy for Downtown which allows exempting up to 1.0 FAR of new commercial construction from providing parking, increasing the reliance on public parking.

Eight potential sites for parking lots or structures were evaluated including the former Pini Building at 1107 Grant, the Chianti Restaurant site at 7416 Redwood, the Community House site at 908 Machin and the house at 916 Sherman to expand the Zenk Lot. Also considered was creating a 75-stall surface lot at the City-owned Novato Depot location.

Due to development of the Downtown SMART station, the City's Depot lot is likely to be developed for station access, drop off and some commuter parking. Staff is now considering creation of approximately 27 public parking spaces along the west side of Railroad Avenue. In addition, staff has discussed the possibility of leasing the vacant parcel at the corner of Vallejo and Machin (adjacent to the Chianti parking lot) for creation of approximately 34 public parking spaces until the property is redeveloped.

Funding Sources

With the loss of Redevelopment, the City has no funding source for downtown parking. Options could include revenue from installation and enforcement of metered parking, creation of a downtown parking assessment district of property owners, parking in-lieu fees from new development or the General Fund.

Policy Recommendations

Walker Recommendations	Staff Response
Expanding Capacity	
Open the Novato Depot parking lot for long-term public parking for the purpose of “pulling” long-term parking out of on-street visitor spaces.	Alternative Recommendation: With approval of the Downtown SMART station, there will be demand for additional commuter parking. Reuse of the former Depot building will also increase parking demand. As an alternative, staff recommends creation of approximately 27 parking spaces along Railroad Avenue, between Grant and Rose Street for downtown users and rail commuters and use of the Depot Lot for commuter drop off, car share parking and potential reuse of the Depot building.
	New Recommendation: Consider leasing the vacant site at Vallejo and Machin for creation of a public parking lot.
	New Recommendation: Evaluate the feasibility of adding on-street parking spaces and additional/expanded surface lots.
Consider implementing 2-hour time restrictions on Grant Avenue west of Redwood Boulevard to encourage employees to park in the private off-street parking lots behind businesses and free up on-street parking for customers and visitors.	Agree. Grant Avenue should have consistent time restrictions.
Eliminate the time limits at the six 15-minute spaces on Redwood Boulevard near the former location of Marin Trophy.	Disagree. The six 15-minute parking stalls on Redwood Boulevard should be increased to 2 hours instead of having an unrestricted time limit.
Negotiate with the owners of Whole Foods to eliminate the two-hour time limit for the 29 parking spaces available for public use, allowing use by downtown or City employees.	Agree. Staff can contact the owners of Mill Works to discuss the idea of allowing long-term employee use of surplus parking stalls. May entail payment of a lease. Need better signage as well.
End the downtown parking waiver program and replace it with a parking credit program by which property owners may pay a monthly or annual fee per required parking space for the purpose of satisfying its tenants’ or business’ parking requirements in the most efficient and inexpensive manner possible.	Disagree. Charging property owners for changes in use that increase parking demand will not be popular and will be difficult to track. Only retain the parking waiver program if the City commits to concurrent funding for expansion of public parking as needed. Allow processing of the current application for redevelopment of the former Pini site under current regulations. Retain a discretionary parking in-lieu fee as an option for developers.

Walker Recommendations	Staff Response
<p>To the extent possible, the City should make efforts to bring underutilized private parking spaces into the pool of publicly available parking.</p>	<p>Agree. Walker’s data indicates that peak occupancies of off-street private parking are 55% during the weekday peak hour and 37% during the weekend peak period. With an estimated private parking supply of 1,776 stalls area wide, private parking is significantly underutilized.</p> <p>Staff has walked all of the Downtown and observed numerous impediments to the use of private parking facilities, including the outdoor storage of materials, barricades preventing entry, and signs that discourage customer parking.</p> <p>Explore options with private property owners to utilize on-site parking for public use in exchange for City payment of insurance, maintenance, signage, etc.</p>
<p>Lease spaces from private parking owners.</p>	<p>See above.</p>
<p>Create an employee parker rewards program in which some or all area employees have a chance to earn rewards as an incentive to park in the Depot lot or other peripheral locations.</p>	<p>Disagree. The City does not currently have staff resources to administer such a program, there are not sufficient peripheral parking locations and this would function only with implementation of paid parking on Grant Avenue.</p>
<p>Create a parking “cash out” to pay City employees to park in the Novato Depot lot, while opening the parking garage under the City’s offices to visitor parking.</p>	<p>Disagree. With use of the Depot Lot associated with the downtown SMART station, there are not peripheral locations in close proximity to shift City parking. The employee commute incentive program may reduce some staff parking demand.</p>
<p>Enforcement/Revenue</p>	
<p>As demand for parking in Downtown Novato increases in the future and if new development occurs, there will likely be a need for more time-restricted spaces and greater enforcement unless a program of paid parking, such as parking meters on Grant Avenue, is implemented to enforce time limits and create a revenue stream.</p> <p>Implement a limited paid parking pilot program for one to two block faces along Grant Avenue east of Redwood Boulevard. We suggest that such a program could generate more revenue than expenses assuming an amortization of any equipment costs over several years or an arrangement with equipment vendors to rent parking kiosks on a trial basis.</p>	<p>Disagree. Staff does not support the installation of parking meters. The cost of establishing meter infrastructure and accompanying enforcement would likely not be covered by fee and fine revenue.</p> <p>A limited roll-out of metered parking, as suggested by Walker, would drive parking demand to other locations, such as the adjacent residential neighborhoods, unless meters or a parking permit system were deployed over a larger area.</p> <p>Overall, the issue of management and enforcement is challenging, recognizing the potential costs of hiring dedicated staff and purchasing associated equipment (e.g., license</p>

Walker Recommendations	Staff Response
	plate recognition cameras) versus the limited duration of peak parking demand in Downtown.
If parking demand east of Redwood Boulevard continues to increase, consider implementing paid parking on Grant Avenue east of Redwood Boulevard and creating a Parking Benefit District.	See comments above regarding parking meters.
Create a dedicated parking fund within the City's general fund to ensure that at least a portion of parking revenue generated in the Downtown areas is dedicated to covering costs in the District including parking maintenance, operations and capital improvements as well as other Downtown improvements if needed. A downtown stakeholder group such as the Downtown Novato Business Association should be consulted as an advisory group regarding decisions related to the allocation of the parking fund.	Agree. A parking fund should be established and funded as part of the annual City budget for future parking needs, particularly if parking waivers are to be granted as an incentive for downtown redevelopment projects.
Management	
Improve signage for the purpose of more effectively communicating the location of parking available to the public.	Agree. Funding for the recently completed Downtown Wayfinding Sign Program was limited, resulting in fewer directional and parking signs than would have otherwise been desired. However, the existing parking signs can be augmented assuming funding is made available.
Assign one entity, perhaps an individual, to manage financial, operational, enforcement, and public relations issues related to the public parking system. Upgrade parking enforcement technology, such as purchasing a license plate recognition system.	Agree. If there is a desire to formalize parking management and enforcement then it should be done through a dedicated parking division. Staff would recommend this function be under the umbrella of Economic Development, with participation from the Public Works and Police Departments. Disagree. Upgraded parking enforcement technology is warranted if the City intends to increase enforcement or create a parking division.