

A Comprehensive Parking Study of University and Raymond Avenues, St. Paul

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Executive Summary

Since the adoption of the small area plan in South St. Anthony Park in 1992, there have been many changes to the state of the University and Raymond Avenues area. These changes have brought to light many off-street parking concerns. This research has been a joint force between the Midway Chamber of Commerce, the St. Anthony Park Community Council and Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization. By a variety of survey techniques, the parking supply was considered with demand to create an idea of what is of concern regarding parking to landowners, business proprietors and drivers in the area. The key finding from the study was the mis-allocation of parking spaces between businesses. Some parking lots were overflowing while others were scarcely filled. The main concern regarded the implementation of building a municipal lot in the area. Some businesses and all of the land owners who responded to the survey felt that building a new lot wasn't the solution, and that the municipality should instead attempt to purchase existing lots in the area.

Introduction

In 1992, a Small Area Plan directed towards South St. Anthony Park in St. Paul was amended to the Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Within this plan, the Raymond Avenue and University Avenue intersection and surrounding area was targeted as a focus area. The identified

parking shortage in the area became a key element of interest as the task force developed long range goals for the Raymond/University study area (see appendix A. for a map of the defined area). While many of the proposed recommendations for the area relates to parking issues, recommendation 21A as stated in the plan calls for "a parking survey of area businesses to determine parking needs and existing supply for individual businesses" (p 10).

In the six years since this adoption of the South St. Anthony Park Small Area Plan, many changes have occurred to bring the community further towards the proposed vision. The redevelopment of the Specialty building on the Southeast corner of University/Raymond for commercial use is the most recent change. Although this is a change that has rekindled the need for additional parking in the area. Therefore in June of 1998, The Midway Chamber Of Commerce joined forces with St. Anthony Park Community Council and Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) to develop the University/Raymond parking study.

The objectives for the study are as follows:

- Supply. Create an inventory map of off-street parking showing location and capacity, ownership, physical features, operating features, regulations, signage and use.
- Demand. Compile area businesses parking concerns, as well as current and ideal location of spaces, relocation or expansion possibilities, and possibilities of pay. Other objectives within Demand were to define the parking habits of motorists in the area. identify traffic movement through the area, and consider the impacts of mass transit (transit hub, metropass, etc.) in the area.
- Building use. The area as currently zoned, and the possibility of change; how this might affect parking.
- Possible Solutions. Including financing methods, limitations and community reactions to proposed solutions.

These objectives comprise a comprehensive off-street parking analysis done at a micro level. The elements of concern from area businesses, land parcel owners, customers and drivers, and local governments have been considered together to bring forth an idea of strategy to combat parking issues in the area.

Beginning with an overall research methodology, the remainder of this report details further the research efforts that were made along with the results and analysis of the findings. It is sincere hope that the findings will aid in local government policy and cohesion with the overall land use plan for the University and Raymond area of St. Paul, bringing the area to a focus on growth rather than maintenance.

Research Methodology

History

The first efforts in the research were to explore a historical perspective of both parking issues generally and the relation of these issues to the University and Raymond areas.

Parking issues are very common in any developing (or redeveloping) area of a city. Historically in the 1950's, it was the Central Business District (CBD) that first experienced a parking crunch. Pre-automobile developments had a very difficult time adjusting to this new addition. More current times, bring not only CBD parking problems, but other areas of the city are also experiencing a crunch similar to that of the 1950's. While the suburbs area boasting ample parking near just about everything, some blooming parts of the city are experiencing the stress and expenses of a new mentality of parking. The influx of mass transit into cities, once thought to be a savior to our parking problems have added to the chaos, creating transit hubs in parts of the city that can not keep up with the added demand. The University and Raymond intersection is one such place, just East of Hwy 280, the area has been recognized by the McComb Group in a commercial/industrial demand study as a "focus of economic activity with strong locational attributes. (p.6)"

As mentioned above, these issues are never only just parking issues. They stem from many other concerns in an area. As with any public policy concern, parking consists of issues relating to zoning, transportation and overall economic vitality among others. The University and Raymond Avenues area of South St. Anthony Park have been concerned with and also undergoing many changes in each of these areas since the adoption of the South St. Anthony Park Small Area Plan by the St. Paul City Council in 1992. In zoning, for example, blocks adjacent to the University and Raymond intersection were to be rezoned with this plan from industrial to commercial uses. The implications that this has on parking will be discussed later in Section III. Part C. on page 17.

Survey Tool Design and Distribution

Business and Landowner Questionnaires

The first step in gathering useful data in terms of the area's parking issue was to design and distribute a business and landowner questionnaire. First of all it was decided that land owners and businesses needed to have different surveys because their interests and knowledge of the problems in the area were different, especially with parking. They also focussed on related but different material.

First of all, the business survey was designed to be longer and more in depth, because it is the businesses that experience the day to day interactions with the area. A copy of this questionnaire is shown in appendix B, page 18. The general content of the business survey focussed on the following objectives:

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Information about the business, including length of time at location, type of business,

number of employees and peak business hours.

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Current parking situation.

-

Ideal parking situation.

-

Future business plans including expansion and relocation.

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Mass transit impact and other concerns and opinions.

The land owner questionnaire was similar but focussed less on current and ideal parking situations and more on leasing and lot information. An example of the land owner survey is shown in appendix C, page 20.

Originally between the two surveys, 166 were sent out by a postal survey. Of these 125 were for businesses, and 41 to area landowners. Those addresses were compiled from two sources, the 1998 Reverse Directory, locating businesses by street address, and by the City of St. Paul's land tax database. The "first wave" of surveys brought back twenty-five returned by the postal service, as moved out of area businesses, and therefor no longer relevant in respects to the questionnaire. Also twenty-eight completed surveys were returned in this time frame. At which point, there was approximately a 20% response rate (28/166-25).

Next, in an effort to boost response rate, an additional forty-five questionnaires were sent to businesses only as a "second wave". These were chosen randomly from a list of non-responses from the first mailing as well as from a list of interested parties. This mailing returned an additional twelve questionnaires, bringing the response rate to approximately 28% with a total of forty returned questionnaires.

Parking Inventory Field Survey

An off-street parking inventory was conducted between the dates of July 13 and 15, 1998. This inventory took place on foot and consisted of the following key elements.

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Each lot was first surveyed to identify ownership and users (indicated by signage) and also a tabulation of the # of spaces, regulations of lot (including time, cost, and reserved parking), and advertisements for lot.

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Next each lot was surveyed at three different times of day (morning, noon, and evening) to determine utilization of the lots by percentage full.

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A photo field survey accompanied the inventory aid in expressing certain concerns of the lots.

This survey was conducted because there was a question of parking supply in the area, and also to provide the basis for a visually representative map that will accompany this project.

Customer/Driver Survey

In order to achieve driver side input, three businesses were recruited by mailing for the distribution of surveys to their customers and employees. For the purposes of this report, the businesses will simply be called by number. Business one was a health care clinic, business two was a retail store, and business three was a restaurant/deli. Each business was different in nature to ensure a range of clientele and parking issues.

The physical survey, shown in appendix D page 21, was a simple questionnaire focussing on the parking habits of area drivers. Business one and three each had the survey in their place of business for one week, while business two had the survey in their place of business for two weeks. Each business distributed the surveys in like ways, offering the survey to customers or employees at a receptionist desk or main register. The total responses from the three businesses were thirty-seven.

Research Findings

Supply

According to the inventory and field survey of off-street parking, there are thirty-one parking lots, and 1108 parking spaces in the University and Raymond area. An overall average of utilization was that the lots were 36.2% full. Broken down into times of day, midday was the most utilized time with an average of 54.4% full, with a high of 113% (overcrowded lot, with double parking) and a low of 10% (a vacant building and lot). Morning was next highest in utilization with an average of 42.7% utilization, and evening was least utilized with an average of 11.2% full. Figure A, below, shows a graph containing the percent utilization per lot at midday, the time of greatest utilization.

Figure A: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

However, the differences in parking lots were not only in utilization but also in the way these lots were advertised to potential drivers. Those lots that were least occupied, i.e. under 30% full, were also least advertised in terms of signage offering assistance to who should be parking and who owns the lot. Whereas those lots that were most filled, over 60%, had visible signage and regulations to who should park there. The business owner questionnaire also detailed that the signage for parking in the area was not adequate, with 71% of all businesses surveyed expressing that their parking was not adequately marked for use. Appendix E on page 22 shows the inventory of parking in the area by location in a map form.

Demand

Area businesses

The business community in the area has been in business for an average of 9.8 years, ranging between .3 and 25 years. This area does not have a high turnover rate. However, those businesses that are "younger" are those of which that are more retail or art oriented, while the "older" businesses are more industry focused. Only 17% if these businesses own their space, but the majority, 66%, have leases that are "more than one year" in length. When asked about relocation plans, 87% of area businesses do not plan to relocate in the future, with an additional 3% who plan to relocate within the area. The spectrum of the different types of businesses in the area are represented below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

Even with such a wide variety of businesses in the area, the parking concerns among them are very similar, and the ideal versus the existing parking situation shows a consistent pattern. Currently, each business either owns or leases an average of 5.2 spaces. Where about 2/3 of the spaces are leased by the business from either the management company they lease their business from or another management company. Of those who pay for their parking, separate from their original lease and rent, pay an average of \$16.50 for each space per month. However, when asked what their ideal parking situation would be, businesses claimed they would like an average of 13 spaces per business. That is almost a 8 space gap from the current situation, or more than double what they have now. However, when asked what they would be willing to pay for each additional space per month, most, 78% said they would like to pay less than \$10 and 50% answered less than \$5. Again a gap is perceived in terms of cost, where the current average was at least \$6.50 more than the majority of ideal parking costs. Another gap, but slightly smaller is noticed in the distance of parking spaces from the business. Figure 3, below, shows the differences in terms of existing parking spaces versus ideal. Where the existing spaces show more spaces at longer distances that the ideal locations.

Figure 3: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

While it seems each business would prefer to have their own lot, it is understood that this is not always a feasible option. The idea of sharing parking lots has been considered to be something that could aid businesses in finding off-street parking, especially for their employees. In fact, according to the business quesitonnaire, over half, 51%, already share parking. The remaining businesses are relatively split in terms of whether they are willing to share parking or not. Figure 4 below shows the precentage split between sharing parking with other businesses.

Figure 4: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

Another way in which the businesses in the area affect demand is the expansion plans that they have for the future. While 77% of those businesses surveyed did not have plans for expansion, of those who did plan to expand over 66% felt they would need additional parking because of their expansion.

Landowner influence

In terms of land/parcel owners in the area, the differences in perceived demand were not much

different from the businesses located in the area. Landowners have a higher length of time in which they have owned their lot versus the time that businesses have been located within them, at an average of 13.5 years, four years longer than the businesses.

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of landowners surveyed claimed having parking available for their building. There was an average of 64 spaces per building surveyed. If the landowner had off-street parking, 14% said they charged outside of a lease for parking. These lots were more often than not (71%) designated only for building use, and 85% of these lots were located on site of the building.

While landowners do not experience day to day parking issues in the area, especially when landowners are not located on site, 22% of them said they've had experienced leasing problems due to parking in the area.

Driver influence

According to the drivers surveyed in business, a majority (77%) parked less than a block away from their destination. An additional 19% parked between one and three blocks from their destination, leaving 3% to park further than three blocks away. Figure 5 below, shows by percentage the location where these drivers parked. Notice that just under 25% parked in an off-street parking lot.

Figure 5: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

While 84% of drivers surveyed claimed that they had only parked for one stop, at one location, the purpose of those drivers stops were varied between many reasons. Figure 6, below, shows the different purposes for the drivers stops (please note that the drivers that were surveyed were in service type businesses and not in industrial locations where the drivers would have been all work-related).

Figure 6: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

In terms of how long the drivers surveyed parked for, the majority (41%) parked for less than 1/2 hour. An additional 28% parked between 1/2 and one hour. Eighteen percent (18%) parked for one to three hours, while 13% parked for over three hours. Seventy percent (70%) did not expect to pay for parking, and everyone who did expect to park expected to pay less than one dollar.

Forty-six percent (46%) of drivers surveyed had difficulties in finding a parking space the day that they were surveyed. Most claimed that they drove around a block two or three times to find an open space, ignoring any off-street parking because "they didn't know if they would be towed there". A few people chose to double park or illegally park otherwise on the street before finding an off-street lot. Of those who did not have trouble finding a space that day, 30% said they had problems with parking in the area in the past, citing the same reasons with the more current problems.

Mass transit and transportation influence

In terms of transportation, University and Raymond Avenues are a high traffic area. University Avenue has the highest traffic use, with approximately 26,000 cars passing through the area through University on a given day (1996, St. Paul Traffic Flow Map). Raymond Avenue and

Territorial Avenue also show a significant traffic flow, with an average of 8,450 and 7,200 cars passing on a given day respectively in 1995 and 1997. The Metropolitan Council has identified the University and Highway 280 intersection as a Transit hub for the near future. With this implication, the traffic through the area is bound to increase further. While traffic patterns may not directly influence parking patterns, the influx of vehicles is related to driver perceptions of harder to find parking, as well as the higher possibility of drivers stopping in the area for various reasons.

Mass transit also influences parking concerns in the area. Businesses surveyed answered a few questions related to their perception of mass transit in the area. Those businesses who said that their customers or employees used mass transit stated that an average of 16.6% of all persons entering the business used mass transit to arrive. Figure 7 below shows first the differences of those who currently utilize mass transit and those who do not, and second whether their mass transit use would increase if there were discounts offered to area business employees for mass transit. The highest percentage (38%) claimed that they notice use of mass transit within their business, but felt that it would not increase if they were offered discounts. Fourteen percent (14%) felt that mass transit was utilized within their business and that they would notice and increase with discounts offered to them.

Figure 7: Not available online. [Click here](#) to order a hard copy of this report.

Building Use and Zoning Changes

In 1992, at the time of the Small Area Land Use plan for South St. Anthony Park, the University and Raymond Avenues area was primarily zoned as I-1 (light industrial) or I-2 (medium industrial). At that time the proposed zoning, and more appropriate for what currently exists, was for B-3 (general business). The implications of this transformation on the parking demand in the area have grown. The nature of the general business zoning ordinance, is that it offers a place for many service and retail oriented businesses. By increasing the service industry in the area, there also incurs an increased parking needs by such businesses customers and clients. Often times this need is much different and much more random than the average parking for industrial zoned places.

Policy Recommendations

Municipal Solutions

There are two main possibilities for the city to intervene in the parking issues in the University and Raymond area. The first would be for the city to purchase vacant lots and build and run parking lots or other parking structures. There currently are at least three vacant buildings in the area that have central locations to most services and retail around the intersection, as well as offer many area businesses and their employees parking. Some area developers feel that there should not be more businesses in these vacant lots, because they would only add to the current parking crunch. When asked in the postal questionnaire, 64% of business owners felt that the city should develop and run parking lots in the area, while not one land owner felt that way. Of course, this extreme difference may have occurred because of the different perceptions of each of these parties. Yet, it is those who are more impacted by the parking dilemma (business owners and their employees and customers) who are more positive about the city building lots.

The second municipal response that could be effective in combating perceived parking problems would be to attempt to purchase and run existing lots. The parking inventory showed that among existing lots, there appears to be a lot of mis-allocation. Certain lots are utilized at small percentages, while others are overflowing with vehicles. This way, there would not be the need to take additional land, that could be used for businesses wishing to move into the area.

Other Recommendations

The survey showed that there is currently under-utilization of mass transit in the area. Customers, businesses, and others who park or work in the area, would benefit by increased awareness of programs that offer discounts to businesses on the bus-line, i.e. the metropass. Also, since Highway 280 and University have been targeted for a transit hub, area businesses need to be included in such decision making that will impact their business.

Conclusions

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