

Main Street Parking Area Strategy



Borough of South River Middlesex County, New Jersey



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May 29, 2018

Michael Beck, Chairperson
South River Planning Board
5 Theresa Place
South River, NJ 08882

Re: Borough of South River Planning Board
Main Street Area Parking Strategy/Plan
Proposed Master Plan Amendment

Dear Sir:

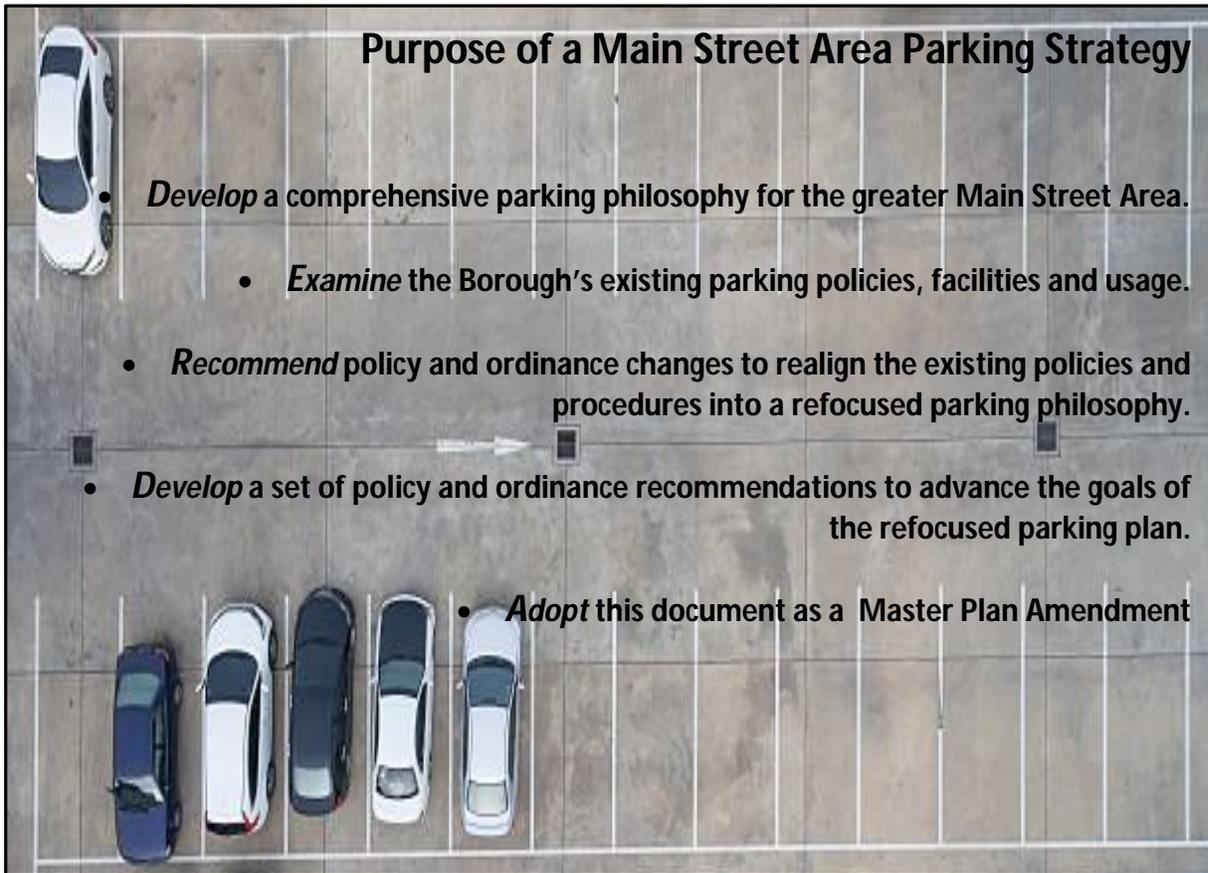
This office has been authorized to provide a Parking Strategy to be proposed as an Amendment to the Borough of South River Master Plan and offers the following planning comments for your consideration.

1. Why is a Main Street Area Parking Strategy Needed?

The Borough of South River has not conducted any substantial *parking* planning efforts in the last 30 years for the Main Street area. This may not have been necessary during that time. The Main Street area has been experiencing a long-trend decline, coinciding with the rise of Route 18 as a regional driver of economic commerce. More recently however, the Borough's Master Planning, Zoning and Redevelopment efforts, along with renewed housing demand and changes in federal floodplain regulations, have refocused the Borough's revitalization efforts on the Main Street area. As of the beginning of 2018, the Borough has seen several new development applications for mixed-use housing developments in or near the Main Street area. Elected officials have observed this "building boom" in residential apartment units and are want to ensure that the Borough's parking policies will not act as an obstacle to re-development of the Borough's aged stock of buildings.

Many residents and business owners believe there is a parking shortage in the Main Street area. Business owners often express concern that *convenient* parking is not available for their customers. Commercial landlords often express concern that potential tenants are hesitant to lease retail space if no convenient customer parking is perceived to be available. Residential and mixed-use developers often propose land-use applications which do not satisfy the Borough's RSIS-based parking standards.

The physical layout of the Main Street area is over 100 years old. Development is often constrained by irregular lots and a non-standard system of driveways and curb cuts. Many buildings were constructed before any parking requirements were in effect and will never have compliant on-site parking. The Borough also has unclear signage directing parkers to municipal lots, and unclear signage and pathways connecting parking areas to retail/commercial uses.



Some parking capacity does exist in the Main Street Area. The Borough owns a municipal parking lot on Obert Street and operates in through its municipal parking utility. That lot contains approximately 99 spaces separated into metered and permit stalls. An additional ± 100 street parking meters existing on Main, Obert, Ferry, Washington and Stephen Streets. The Main Street area also contains several dozen irregular, unconnected or isolated paved areas used as parking lots. Almost all of these isolated lots are privately owned. (See image below.)

The Borough parking utility is an uncomplicated institution which does not employ any full-time employees or collect any data beyond accounting for revenue. It does not typically conduct long-range facilities planning. Rather, policies are established from historical operations and facilities are refurbished on an ad-hoc basis. Based on information provided by the Borough Finance Officer and the Borough Police Chief in early 2018, the Borough parking lot on Obert Street has current capacity for additional vehicles, however it is nearing a “maximum historical capacity” in terms of number of parking permits sold for this lot.



While some limited bus service is available for residents, the Borough has generally poor linkages to mass transit. Where other communities with transit connections, shared parking facilities, or sizeable transit ridership have been able to adopt alternate (lower) parking standards, this would not be a realistic option for the Borough. Local parking is still needed at this time.

A comprehensive parking strategy is now needed. This Main Street Area Parking Strategy is proposed as that document. This strategy is intended to serve the Borough Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Municipal Parking Utility as these entities make future policy decisions related to parking in the Borough of South River.

2. Parking demand varies throughout the day and by user, however most cars spend 95% of their lifespan parked:

Parking Need by Use:	Typical Peak Parking Need:
<i>Residents</i>	Need all day and overnight parking. Would benefit from alternatives to individual auto use
<i>Businesses</i>	Need all day and late evening parking for employees and customers. Need convenient high-turnover spots for retail customers. Need short-term loading on a shared basis.
<i>Restaurants</i>	Need evening long-term parking for employees. Need evening short-term parking for customers.
<i>Special Events</i>	Need long-term weekend and evening.
<i>Schools, Houses of Worship</i>	Need all day parking for employees. Need long-term evening and weekend parking for events.
<i>Municipal Facilities</i>	Need all day parking for employees. Need long-term evening and weekend parking for events.

3. Where is the “Main Street Parking Area?”

This area is intended to generally include all properties located within the Main Street Rehabilitation (MSR) Zoning and Waterfront Revitalization (WR) Districts, all properties located within any designated Area in Need of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation, and additional properties within a 5-minute walking distance to any of the above areas.



4. Inventory and Locations of Borough Parking Facilities in the Main Street Area:

Location:	Metered	Unmetered/Handicapped
Main Borough parking lot on Obert Street	30	69
Main Street meters	46	3
Stephen Street meters	9	0
Ferry Street meters	23	0
Obert Street meters	3	0
Washington St meters between Ferry and Gordon	19	3
SUB-TOTAL:	130	75
Borough Office lot on Washington St	0	23
Washington/Jackson Lot	0	21
TOTAL:	130	119



5. Main Street Area Parking Goals

This strategy is intended to advance the following objectives:

- A. To better coordinate the provision of conveniently-located public parking to serve all residents and businesses in the vicinity of the Main Street area, which should be available at some cost to the user.
- B. To ensure on-site parking requirements will not be an inhibitor to economic development or the revitalization of existing properties and buildings.
- C. To recognize that many parcels in the vicinity of the Main Street corridor are narrow or irregular in shape and contain existing buildings or pavement.
- D. To acknowledge that development proposals which do not provide sufficient on-site parking have historically relied on shared parking arrangements, which have created scattered parking lots throughout the area; or have relied on the purchase of a finite number of parking permits from the municipal parking utility, which will one-day reach maximum capacity.
- E. To acknowledge the Borough has a number of municipal parking areas which are in need of capital improvement and consideration for long-term expansion.
- F. To recognize the capital costs of constructing new parking facilities, including land acquisition, will represent a substantial financial cost to the Borough in the future.
- G. To provide for a clear policy preference to guide how and where parking should be provided in the area, as well as establishing a policy for how and where off-site parking should be provided during an Application for Development.
- H. To allow for off-site parking, in a method contemplated by this plan, to be a more zoning-compliant solution to an on-site parking shortage.
- I. To provide the basis for a municipal ordinance wherein, in lieu of requiring the construction of parking spaces on-site, both developers and the Borough could benefit from a mechanism permitting parking spaces to be provided via contribution to a capital fund, and wherein such contributions would be combined to pay the costs of constructing or expanding municipal parking facilities under the coordination of the Borough of South River.
- J. To increase the parking utility revenue stream via purchase of additional parking permits/meters.
- K. To verify that when parking permits are sold to a purchaser, that the parking utility has a policy in place to verify that a realistic opportunity for parking is available in a municipal lot, which should not necessarily be a guarantee of a designated parking stall.
- L. To provide guidelines for expansion of parking facilities, so as to be available for future development applications which do not construct on-site parking.
- M. For the Borough to recapture the capital costs of constructing parking spaces that are “lost” when parking variances are granted.



6. The Main Street Parking Area Vision: Principals to Guide Policy Recommendations

- Off-street parking facilities **should** serve new and existing residents and businesses and be available (at some cost) to future developers seeking parking variances.
- Borough parking facilities **should** have sufficient capacity to accept new permit customers.
- If parking facilities are nearing capacity, the Borough **should** consider strategic, limited expansion of parking supply to provide greater convenience and grow parking utility revenues.
- The Borough **should** maintain a traditional, walkable, downtown streetscape in the Main Street area, even if this means some buildings will provide no on-site parking.
- The Borough **should** have a clear parking policy for developers and property owners to follow when parking cannot, or should not, be provided on-site.
- Some Main Street area parcels are difficult to re-develop because of the layout requirements for on-site parking, including access aisles, street connections, and driveways. These properties **should** still be rehabilitated or re-developed. The Borough **should** consider ordinance tools to overcome these existing conditions. The Borough **should** allow a way for parking to be provided off these sites and into one or more central parking facilities, for some fee.
- Some developers **should** be able to contribute to a parking capital fund in lieu of providing on-site parking.
- The Borough **should** adopt a permit limit policy for the public parking lot(s) at a designated permit to space ratio.
- The Borough **should** clarify parking information, parking rules and parking signage.
- The Borough **should** use technology to modernize the parking payment system to make it easier and more welcoming for residents and visitors to use and find parking when needed.

7. Planning and Policy Recommendations:

A. For Current Parking Facilities and Utilities:

1. The parking utility should conduct a once-a-year physical inspection of all parking facilities, lots, meters, and infrastructure and provide an annual report providing short and long-term maintenance needs and expansion goals.
2. The parking utility should adopt an overall approach to replace obsolete meters and systems with a modern, digital, parking fee collection system of smart-meters or smart parking systems/kiosks which will both automatically collect data and increase revenue opportunities. As technology is constantly evolving, emerging systems should be considered. Credit card payment mechanisms should be available.
3. Modern parking facilities are becoming integrated into the smartphone user experience via several commercial parking applications, commonly termed, "apps." The Borough should explore connecting its meters to a smartphone application platform such as "*Parkmobile*" or similar commercially available payment systems. The system should be popular on a state or regional basis.
4. The parking utility should adopt a clear policy to guide the number of parking permits sold relative to the number of parking spaces available. A permit limit policy for the public parking lots between is recommended. This should be between a 1-space-to-1.5-permit or a 1-space-to-2.0-permit ratio, depending on the composition of permit purchasers. The permit application process should gather this user data as needed.

B. When Considering Future Parking Locations and Facilities:

1. The Borough should make future parking expansion decisions based on usage data collected from current lots, meters, permits and users.

2. New parking opportunity areas should be located so as to expand or connect to existing parking areas, alleys, access driveways, infrastructure, and pedestrian alleys.
3. Parking should be integrated into the ground level of new buildings when possible.
4. No new parking lots or structures should be constructed to front on walkable streetscape areas including, but not limited to Main Street or Ferry Street.
5. Parking should be located and/or accessed from "rear lot" locations such as from George Street, Stephen Street, Thomas Street or Washington Street, so as not to interrupt the retail viability and walkable tempo of Main Street/Ferry Street retail areas.
6. Surface or structured parking is acceptable in flood-prone areas east of Reid/Water Streets in combination with green infrastructure and stormwater management improvements.
7. Parking can be located in other locations if it is wrapped, screened or covered by retail/commercial or residential uses.
8. Consider parking expansion in locations where it can be developed into a Community Transportation Hub which includes car and bus connections. Two or three (3) hubs should be considered, each at different "ends" of the Main Street area. Hubs can put nearly the entire Main Street area within a ¼ mile (5 minute) walk. Available at these hubs could/should be: permit-based parking, bike sharing, car sharing, taxi services, and bus stops and shelters.

C. Specific Recommendations for Individual Facilities:

Obert Street Lot: Obert Street lot should be considered for expansion and long-term conceptual redevelopment. Redevelopment opportunities may include surface expansion, acquisition of abutting parking lots, construction of a parking structure, or construction of a mixed-use building with ground level parking and upper-level residential space, all owned, leased, and/or operated by a parking utility, private entity, or public/private partnership.

D. Recommendations for Parking Ordinance Revisions:

The Borough should consider an ordinance establishing a capital fund/trust fund and permitting developers or property owners to provide monetary contributions to this fund in lieu of providing on-site parking. The ordinance should specify the geographic limits of the eligibility area. The ordinance should provide a clear procedure for how monies in the fund are to be spent. The ordinance should provide a clear procedure for how development applications can utilize the provisions of the ordinance. The ordinance should relate to the Borough's parking requirements and the need for parking variances.

E. For Planning/Zoning Board Guidance on Development Applications:

- Priority 1: Provide on-site parking if & wherever possible
- Priority 2: Provide off-site parking via contribution to a capital fund to construct new parking
- Priority 3: Provide off-site parking in a Borough parking facility via permit in perpetuity
- Priority 4: Provide off-site parking via contract in a private parking facility
- Priority 5: Rely on free market purchase of meters/permit spaces

F. Additional Recommendations for Borough-wide Consideration:

1. Improve user experience in meter usage and parking space identification.
2. Create Borough-wide parking wayfinding program with a clear consistent signage theme.
3. Improve mobility options for residents who choose to live without cars.
4. Create reserved parking spots for Electric Vehicles (EVs) including charging stations.
5. Understand the future impact of shared vehicles and driverless cars, including how this will change parking demand in the next 30 years.