

# Sparks of

## Parking.

What's the first thing in customers' minds when they see that word? It might be tickets or meters or parking garages, but no matter what it is, the feeling associated may not be a good one. The parking services program in Eugene, Ore., Epark Eugene, aims to change that image for the better, positively affecting our community and influencing the world.



# Creativity

Looking to revitalize a parking program?  
Eugene, Ore., found creativity was the key.

By Jeff Petry



A mural project at the Downtown Eugene Transit Station was paid for with parking revenue.

*Epark Eugene is modeling new ways to encourage economic development and enhance neighborhood livability by reinvesting parking funds into projects and activities that benefit the system.*

The idea comes from professor and author Donald Shoup. He suggests using paid parking revenue to benefit the surrounding areas. I first heard of Shoup and his theories when he visited Eugene in 2006 to talk about transportation and its role in revitalizing our downtown core. I had been on the job as the city of Eugene's parking manager just four months when I saw him speak. He was quoted by the local paper saying our downtown had plenty of parking and our problems stemmed from parking mismanagement, antiquated meters, and "the ugliest parking structure" he had ever seen!<sup>1</sup> At the time, I took the word "mismanagement" personally as a reflection of how we did business. Over the years, I grew to learn that Shoup was not referring to the day-to-day parking financial systems, but to parking's effect on the perceptions and success of the community as a whole.

Parking has historically been looked at as a tool for creating turnover and generating revenue. When the automobile was invented in the late 1880s, it revolutionized transportation and set in motion the technological advances that would lead to today's parking system. But as the country urbanized and the Federal Highway Act of 1921 started to connect cities, downtown cores became crowded with more and more vehicles. Business owners became frustrated with the lack of on-street parking turnover because customers could not access their stores.

The solution to this parking tragedy was the parking meter. The first parking meter was installed in 1935 in Oklahoma City, Okla. It was a technological solution to managing crowded downtown business districts. It automated parking time restrictions by requiring payment to park, moved long-term vehicle parking out of specific areas, and provided customers with more readily available parking adjacent to businesses. The parking meter solution spread throughout the country during the Great Depression.

The city of Eugene installed this technological solution to crowded downtown streets in 1939 with 145 meters in our downtown core. For the next 80 years, the city would oscillate between periods of free and paid parking and experience the resulting emotions that came with each system.

Epark Eugene is modeling new ways to encourage economic development and enhance neighborhood livability by reinvesting parking funds into projects and activities that benefit the system. We are expanding on Shoup's work in Old Pasadena, Calif., that used paid parking revenue to enhance curbside amenities, such as cleaner sidewalks, landscaping, and seating, and marketed the expenditures to parking customers.

In a previous *The Parking Professional* article (see the June 2014 issue), I shared examples of how we have changed our parking image (uniforms, brand) and program philosophy (zero-ticket goal, college students are our community's future, educate first). We also had just started to explore how parking resources could invest in the community and the arts, from poetry panels to locally created artistic bike corrals.

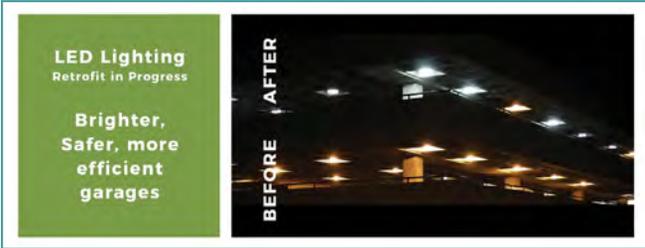
We have now ramped up the parking reinvestment program to use resources collected from parking meters, permits, validations, tickets, and garage commercial leases to maintain our parking infrastructure and put money back into the community in five broad areas:

**Economic Development**

Parking is a key economic development tool in our downtown core and campus area parking district. Similar to other municipal parking programs, we work with new and current businesses to meet their customer and employee parking needs, including finding less expensive commute options through carpooling, bus, rapid transit, and biking. Further, we have invested in:

- On-street bike corrals to allow easier cyclist access to downtown merchants.
- A downtown wayfinding plan that seeks to move vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians into and around our downtown.





- An advanced parking meter system that uses on-street single-space vehicle sensors and off-street occupancy signs to inform downtown parking options.
- An advanced parking payment system that allows coins, credit cards, Google, and Apple Pay, as well as smartphone app payments, to meet current and future transaction needs.
- Time with developers, businesses, and community partners to discuss their investments in the community's transportation and parking options.

### Promoting Safety

A safe and inviting parking system, business district, and community are key to attracting new and maintaining existing parking customers. We have invested in:

- Downtown Eugene police services by transferring \$838,000 (15 percent of operating revenue) from the parking fund to the general fund to create the downtown substation and provide ongoing financial support.
- Round-the-clock parking security services for downtown garages and the downtown core.
- Upgraded yellow-hued garage lights to motion-activated, LED lamps and deep-cleaned the interior and exterior of three garage representing 40 percent of our downtown structure parking spaces.
- Forming partnerships with the school district, performing arts



A new parking plan let groups of children enjoy performing arts in ways that weren't possible before.



A garage deep clean and lighting upgrade made a big difference.

center, and businesses to reinvent a program bringing 3,000 elementary children downtown to experience performing art.

### Neighborhood Strengthening

The Parking Services program responds to vehicle parking issues across Eugene. In neighborhoods with time-limited parking, we enhance livability by discouraging neighborhood streets from turning into non-resident parking lots. We have invested in:

- Market-based residential parking zone permits (\$99/\$150 per quarter) in areas zoned high density, coupled with a reduced homeowner/long-term renter price (\$40/year).
- The arena parking district to mitigate impacts from a campus basketball arena abutting a low-density residential campus neighborhood (see "Shooting for Three," *The Parking Professional*, April 2012).
- Parking officers, who reported trash in the right-of-way and suspicious activity in neighborhoods.
- Parking officers, who worked to remove abandoned vehicles and trailers from neighborhood streets.



The department made a big effort to clear sidewalks and clean up abandoned vehicles.

- Parking services that helped mediate disputes over motor home parking between neighbors by working with the residents and paying for community mediation services.

**Promoting the Arts and Identity**

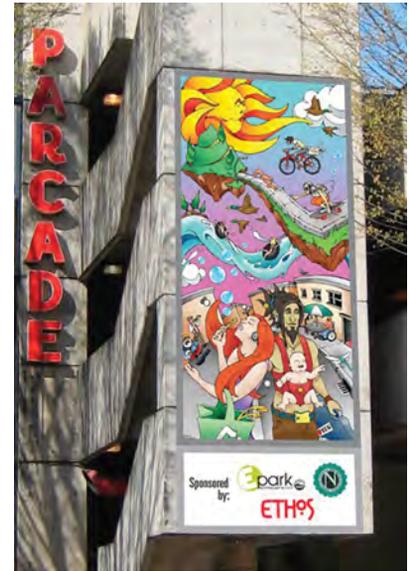
The parking services program has forged ongoing partnerships with the local creative community. This investment area has had the greatest effect on changing the view of municipal parking in Eugene. We have invested in:

- The 20x21 mural project, whose goal is to create 20 world-class murals by 2021. The parking fund provides \$30,000 per year for the project.
- The written word, showcasing local writers for our Step into Poetry, Stories, and Theatre project in a downtown parking structure, which encourages customers to use the stairs while simultaneously reinvigorating the stairwell.

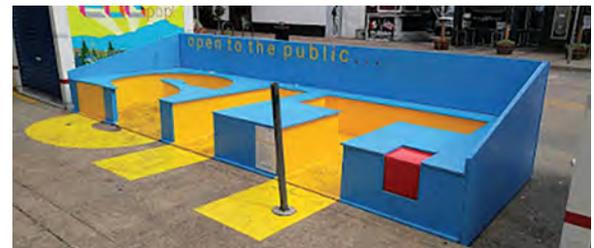
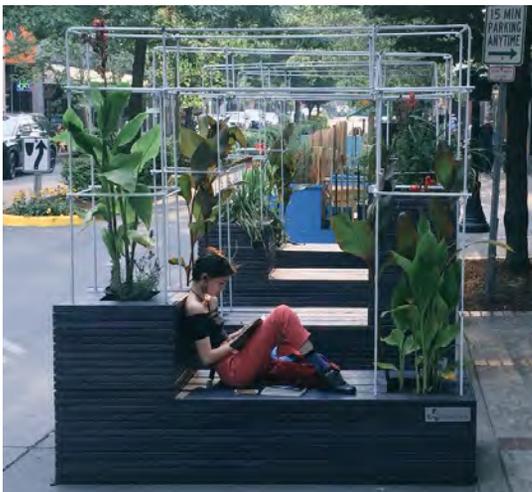


Local writers got a chance to shine in this unique installation.

- Downtown events such as Light-Up Downtown, Eugene Parade, Tech Tour, and Sunday Streets, as a title sponsor.
- Downtown parklets, a unique partnership with the American Institute of Architects Southwest Oregon chapter that provided a \$10,000 design/build competition to place four parklet structures in our downtown core.



Creativity and art took center stage in a competition to create the best banner.



Parklets bring the community to parking in a new way.



More EV charging stations were installed.

Clear signage let patrons and neighbors know what initiatives were happening and why.

### Being Future-Ready

Parking Services is working to create a municipal parking program that is ready for the future of Eugene. We look for technological solutions that allow us to do more with the same resources, meet the emerging needs of our customers, and reduce deferred maintenance. We have invested in:

- Reducing the \$10 million backlog of deferred maintenance in our six downtown parking structures.
- An augmented reality technology overlay for our Step into Poetry project in the Overpark Garage.
- Creating an interactive parking ping-pong game to play on the sidewalk of a downtown parking garage through partnership with the University of Oregon's Computer Information Sciences Department. (Think an Xbox Kinect camera played with LED lights across a full block.)
- Creating a parking business intelligence analyst position to draw insights from the hundreds of thousands of monthly parking data points from meter use, permit purchases, citations, occupancy sensors, and community-wide complaints to merge with community development and planning data.
- The annual Hack for a Cause event to develop new ideas with our local tech community. Parking donates a reserved parking space to the winning team and has pitched ideas such as the parking ping-pong project and a digital donation app that allows direct giving to social services downtown.
- The city of Eugene's designation as a Mozilla Gigabit and U.S. Ignite community. Parking Services sits on their respective local committees.

### World Championships 2021

A decade ago, Shoup challenged the city of Eugene to level-up its parking management system. Today, we are meeting that challenge. The parking services program plays a critical role in promoting economic development and enhancing neighborhood livability. We operate a self-sufficient, municipal parking

program that manages an off-street parking system (surface lots and garages), an on-street system (meters, two-hour signs, residential parking permit zones), supports nearly every city department, and reinvests parking revenue back into the community. We have taken an innovative and creative approach to connecting with our community by adding art to parking me-

*As the transportation and parking system continues to change, the city of Eugene will evolve along with it to support our community through the parking reinvestment program.*

ters, partnering with the local tech scene, and setting up a parking manager's lemonade stand to listen to our customers (see the January 2013 issue of The Parking Professional for more). As the transportation and parking system continues to change, the city of Eugene will evolve along with it to support our community through the parking reinvestment program.

Looking ahead to 2021, Eugene will host the World Track and Field Championships. It will be the largest sporting event in the world that year and will add Eugene to an international list of stellar hosts such as London, Beijing, and Moscow. Our parking reinvestment program is working to enhance the community and create a wonderful experience for every customer, through 2021 and beyond. 

### Note

1. Register Guard, Feb. 6, 2007, p. C1.



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