

# Executive Summary of Searching For A Space: An Analysis of Eugene's Free Parking Policy

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**Project Name:** Searching For A Space: An Analysis of Eugene's Free Parking Policy  
**Prepared By:** Community Planning Workshop (CPW)  
**Prepared For:** Downtown Eugene, Inc.  
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## Executive Summary

This report evaluates the effects of a free 2-hour parking program in downtown Eugene. Its aim is to understand if the parking program is achieving its intended goals, what the perceptions of the business community are about its operation, and what other impacts the parking program is having on downtown. Results from a survey of businesses, a survey of downtown visitors and a series of parking counts were used to help answer these questions.

The analysis is the second study of downtown Eugene's parking program; Claire Ottwell completed the first study in Spring 2011 with the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Community and Regional Planning.

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## Survey of Downtown Businesses

Downtown Eugene Inc. invited 142 businesses in the downtown area to complete a survey about parking in January 2013. Sixty-two (62) surveys were returned that helped to provide an understanding of what the business community is concerned about and how the free parking has impacted their businesses. Key findings from this survey show that:

1. Businesses are concerned about employees abusing the free curbside spaces that are intended for use by patrons.
  2. Parking availability is not optimal.
  3. Some businesses that depend on parking are not seeing the intended impacts of the program in terms of increased revenues or patronage volumes.
  4. Support for the free 2-hour parking program is high, but many businesses indicated it is not working.
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## Survey of People Who Park Downtown

While understanding the concerns of the business community is essential, it is also important to know what patrons and visitors to downtown think about parking availability. As the people who use the parking on a daily basis, their opinions and thoughts are necessary to ensure the parking policies do

not deter them from coming downtown. To collect opinions of drivers, CPW administered a 13-question survey to 50 people who parked their car within the 2-hour free zone in March and April 2013. The responses of the survey show that:

1. People like free parking and they think it has a positive impact on downtown.
  2. Some people would visit downtown less often if meters were introduced.
  3. A majority of people travel downtown by other modes, indicating people are at times willing to come downtown without a car regardless of the incentive of free parking
  4. Drivers indicate they stay in downtown longer than the parking program allows.
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## **Survey of Parking Counts**

Both surveys documented people's perceptions and opinions of downtown parking. To provide more contexts about the actual parking conditions CPW performed parking counts during each hour in which the parking meters and 2-hour time limits are enforced. The counts were conducted Monday through Saturday in April 2013 and included areas within and outside the free zone. The parking counts demonstrate that:

1. Some parking areas are often full for most of the day, while other areas have availability during all hours of the day.
  2. Parking spaces in the free 2-hour zone were consistently more occupied than spaces in the metered zone. The weekday average occupancy rate was 77 percent in the free zone and 42 percent in the metered zone (7:00 AM to 6:00 PM).
  3. Since the last series of parking counts in 2011, parking occupancy rates in the free 2-hour zone have increased by about 14 percentage points.
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## **Recommendations**

The purpose of this evaluation was to study how well the free parking policy is working and what the City of Eugene can do to ensure downtown businesses benefit from curbside parking. Based on the findings of this study, CPW developed the following recommendations that are intended to ensure parking availability and efficient use of downtown parking spaces:

1. Continue to evaluate the conditions of downtown parking.
2. Create performance measures for the downtown parking program.
3. Establish a sunset provision for the termination of the free 2-hour zone.
4. Educate downtown employees about alternative options to on-street parking.
5. Implement variable pricing of parking meters by hour and location.
6. Use meter revenue locally.
7. Develop a better pedestrian, bicycle and transit infrastructure.