

MONTPELIER PARKING SURVEY FINDINGS

Presented by the
Montpelier Parking Committee

11/20/13

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The purpose of these surveys was to gauge public perception of the parking situation in downtown Montpelier. Recognizing that perception may be based on perspective, we offered four surveys - one for Montpelier residents (residents), one for people who work in downtown Montpelier (employees), one for people who own or run businesses in downtown Montpelier (employers), and one for people who patronize downtown Montpelier (consumers). Each of the four surveys attempted to ask specific questions pertinent to those perspectives, and respondents were welcome to answer each survey that related to them – as long as they only responded to each survey once. For instance, if a person lived, worked, and shopped in Montpelier, they may have completed 3 of the 4 surveys.

The survey was conducted using the on-line survey tool *Survey Monkey*. A link to an introduction page with the four surveys was posted on the City of Montpelier website from the end of August through October 1, 2013. During that period over 1,200 surveys were completed. The following are the response rates for each survey:

Residents = 444 respondents

Employees = 380 respondents

Consumers = 345 respondents

Employers = 52 respondents

Outreach

The committee reached out to various businesses and constituencies in Montpelier to promote the survey. The committee drafted an e-mail introduction that outlined the purpose of the survey and included links to the online version of all four survey sections. This e-mail outreach was shared broadly with the Vermont State Employees Association, the Vermont NEA, the American Federation of Teachers, Hunger Mountain Coop, the Montpelier School Board, National Life, Montpelier Montessori School, Turtle Island Children's Center, Onion River Sports, and Montpelier Alive. The Montpelier Bridge proved to be helpful in advertising the work of the committee and printed notices regarding the surveys. In addition to this outreach, members of the committee posted links to the survey on Facebook and relied on this social media tool to drive participation.

Limitations

No survey is without its limitations. For one, there was no way to ensure that people were not filling out surveys more than once. Trusting in the good faith of our fellow Vermonters we feel that it was unlikely this was an issue. In addition, the goal of any survey is to gauge opinions of a given population by surveying subsets of that population. While *Survey Monkey* is free and easy to use, our approach was less academic allowing for no way to measure sampling error or control for potential bias. Finally, the survey was offered on-line only, making it difficult for those without a computer or internet to access the survey. While we believe the survey was a useful and valuable first step in gauging public perception of the parking situation in Montpelier, we also caution readers to be mindful of the survey's limitations. It should also be noted that significant roadwork was happening downtown (related to the district heat project) during the survey period.

Going Forward

The survey will be a useful tool in helping guide the agenda and potential future recommendations of the parking committee. The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the survey. It does not provide any recommendations at this time.

Resident Survey Results

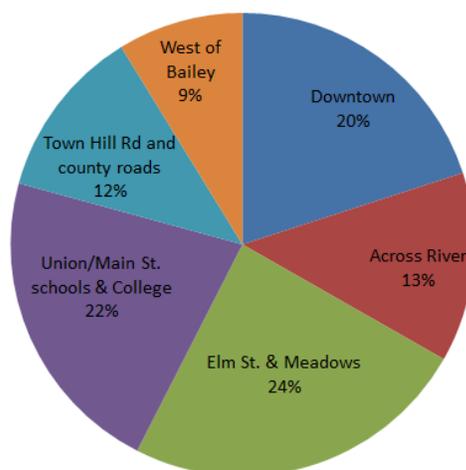
Number of Respondents = 444

Summary: Three quarters of resident respondents felt there was a parking problem downtown. Approximately half of resident respondents worked downtown, and a quarter lived within downtown. Resident respondents overwhelmingly owned cars and had access to off-street parking. In addition, a strong majority of respondents use their cars to commute to work, most of who use their car as the primary source of transportation for getting to work. Half of respondents reported walking to work, and 21% sometimes ride their bikes.

Three-quarters of resident respondents said there was not a parking problem in their neighborhoods, with 90% of respondents saying they have access to off-street parking in their neighborhoods. Most resident respondents owned their home and almost all had cars. Of those who rent, an overwhelming majority said that parking was an important factor in choosing their housing. Finally more than half of the respondents felt the winter parking ban should be modified in good weather.

- 26% of resident respondents lived downtown – defined as between Barre St., the Main St. traffic circle, Bailey Street, and the river.
- Approximately half of resident respondents (48%) work in downtown Montpelier.
- Of the many forms of transportation used to get to work, 83% use cars, 51% walk, 21% bike, and 6% take the bus.
 - When asked about their primary form of transportation, 66% said car, 23% walk, and 5% bike.
- 75% of resident respondents think there is a parking problem in downtown Montpelier.
 - 43% said it was worse in the winter, while 39% felt no particular season was worse.
- Only 25% of resident respondents thought there was a parking problem in their neighborhood.
 - Of those who did, 50% thought it was worse in the winter and 44% thought no particular season was worse.
- 69% of resident respondents own their home.
 - Of those who rent, 87% said that parking was an important factor in choosing their housing.
- 98% of resident respondents have a car and 90% have off-street parking at their residence.
- 34% of resident respondents said they were affected by the overnight parking ban in the winter of which 66% said they were negatively impacted, while 17% said they were neither positively or negatively impacted and 13% said they were both positively and negatively impacted.
- 63% of resident respondents thought the winter parking ban should be modified in good weather.
- The following pie chart shows the geographically distribution of the resident respondents neighborhoods:

Geographical Residences of Respondents



The survey provided resident respondents the opportunity to provide suggestions as to how the current winter parking ban should be modified, of which 175 suggestions and comments were received. From these, common themes were identified and given weight based on frequency. Many of the respondents had more than one suggestion and each suggestion was attributed to a corresponding theme. The following are those theme in order of frequency:

- Parking ban only when there is snow = 37
- The city should have some form of signal or flashing light system (similar to Burlington) = 24
- Parking ban should be based on weather forecasts and instituted when snow events are forecasted = 21
- Parking ban should be based on when plowing and snow removal are necessary = 20
- The city could do more outreach/communication in instituting a parking ban through the use of e-mail blasts, internet, hotlines, radio, TV, etc. = 17
- The city should consider alternate side of the street parking or alternate street parking = 13
- The city should be more lenient with ticketing concerning the winter ban = 12
- The city should lift the winter ban all together = 7
- The parking ban period should be shortened, especially during milder months = 5
- Residents should be able to park in light snow, but not in deep snow = 4
- The city should not lift the winter ban = 2
- Residents should be allowed to park in parking garages overnight during winter = 2
- The city should tow and ticket to enforce ban = 1
- The city should not consider flashing lights (like Burlington) = 1
- Residents should be able to park in the lot off East State St and First in Fitness = 1

Resident respondents were also given the opportunity to provide comments, suggestions or concerns as it relates to their parking experience in downtown Montpelier, of which 180 suggestions and comments were received. From these, common themes were identified and given weight based on frequency. Many of the

respondents had more than one comment, suggestion or concern and each was attributed to a corresponding theme. The following are those themes in order of frequency:

- The city should build a parking garage for general use = 26
- The city should develop more incentives for alternative modes of transport to/from downtown (suggestions include opening private lots on weekends for public use, more bike racks and improved walking/biking trails, more frequent bus routes) = 18
- Downtown parking is not an issue = 17
- City residents should be granted a free/reduced cost parking permit or reserved spaces = 17
- The city has inadequate downtown parking, but no solution provided = 17
- The city should build a parking garage for employees (both downtown and state) = 15
- Safety is the major concern of city parking issue, the city should evaluate parking ordinances and traffic lights on busy corners = 12
- The city should modify the parking ban (suggestions included above) = 11
- The downtown city parking is too expensive and/or meter times are too short = 9
- The city should not add more parklets = 9
- The city should do more snow clearing to remove it from busy streets = 8
- The city should increase enforcement of all traffic-related issues, including pedestrians, bicyclists, residents = 7
- The city should permit parking on only 1 side of the street during winter for busy side streets = 6
- The city should develop a 'walkable downtown' model with a pedestrian street similar to Church Street in Burlington = 5
- The city should offer free parking = 5
- Commuters should be granted a pass, be designated to a private lot and shuttled into the downtown = 4
- The city should not make additional parking available in the downtown = 4
- Downtown parking is only an issue when the legislature is in session = 4
- No reservation of parking spaces (public or private) should be permitted = 3
- property and reduce street congestion = 2
- The city should modify property laws so that driveways can be built on private property and reduce street congestion = 2
- The city should develop more downtown housing so driving downtown is not necessary = 2
- The city should invest in a third party research study on parking patterns for more resilient strategies = 1

Employee Survey Results

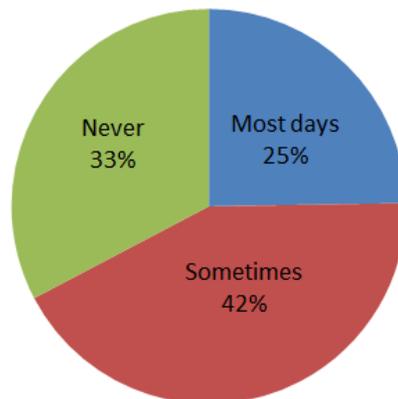
Number of Respondents = 380

Summary: Most of the employee respondents commute to Montpelier from other towns. Most respondents also drive regularly and never carpool, take a bus, walk, or ride a bike to work. Most said they

had access to parking through work but were split on whether the parking was adequate. Those that did not have access to parking through their employer were split on the level of inconvenience. Many of those that do not have access to parking either park on unmetered streets or at meters. Responses concerning either knowledge of or interest in “incentives” promoting the use of buses or other forms of alternative transportation were also mixed.

- 68% of employee respondents lived outside of Montpelier.
- 56% of employee respondents were state employees, 33% were employed by local business, and 11% responded “other”.
- 79% of employee respondents said they drive to work most days, 15% drive sometimes, and 6% never drive to work.
- 75% of employee respondents said they never carpool, while 19% sometimes carpool and 6% carpool most days.
- 87% of employee respondents never take the bus, 11% take the bus sometimes, and 3% take the bus most days.
- 77% of employee respondents never walk to work, 15% walk sometimes, and 8% walk most days.
- 81% of employee respondents never ride their bike to work, 16% ride sometimes, and only 3% ride to work most days.
- 42% sometimes have trouble finding parking when they drive to work, 33% never have a problem, and 25% never have a problem finding parking when they come to work most days.

How often do you have trouble finding parking when you drive to work?



- 38% of employee respondents generally park very close to their work, 37% walk less than 5 minutes, 20% have a 5 to 10 minute walk to work from where they park, 3% have more than a 10 minute walk, and 3% said it was not applicable.
- 74% of employee respondents have access to employee parking.
 - When asked if that parking was adequate, 36% responded yes, 40% responded no, and 24% said it does not apply to them.

- 39% of those whose employer does not provide parking said it was a minor inconvenience, 35% said it was a significant inconvenience, and 27% it was not an inconvenience at all.
- *NOTE: When asking the question of where those who do not have access to employer parking generally park, there was an option “does not apply”, which received 58% of the response. This may have been where those who do have parking clicked because it did not apply to them inadvertently skewing the results. As such, this question’s results should probably be excluded.*
- When asked if their employer offered incentives for using public transportation or alternative forms of transportation, 49% said no, 30% said yes, and 21% said they were not sure.
 - *NOTE: given that a little more than half of the employee respondents were state employees, and yet almost half responded no, when we know the state does offer incentives, it is possible that the use of the term “incentive” may have been a poor term to use (with many thinking of incentives as rewards or bonuses, rather than discounts).*
 - When asked if they would take advantage of such incentives if offered, 44% said they’d consider it, 29% said no, and 27% said yes.
- 86% of employee respondents thought there was a parking problem in Montpelier.
 - 50% said it was worse in the winter, while 37% said no particular season was worse.

The survey provided employee respondents the opportunity to provide comments, suggestions or concerns as it relates to working and parking in Montpelier, of which 153 responses were received. From these, common themes were identified and given weight based on frequency. Many of the respondents had more than one comment, suggestion or concern and each was attributed to a corresponding theme. The following are those themes in order of frequency:

- Downtown priority parking for legislators, aides, etc. is unfavorable, legislators should be on “first-come, first-serve basis” with all other commuters = 41
- The city should build a garage downtown, free to members of the business community and state employees = 21
- Inadequate downtown parking results in employees having to pay to work, the city should develop alternative systems (suggestions include more leased spaces to businesses, swipe card provided to employees for restricted area parking) = 13
- The city has inadequate downtown parking and should be improved by offering more incentives to limit congestion (suggestions include more bike racks, more carpool spaces, telecommuting for state classified employees) = 12
- The downtown city parking is too expensive and/or meter times are too short = 11
- The city has inadequate downtown parking, but no solution provided = 11
- Inadequate downtown parking results in less consumer activity for employees after-work hours = 7
- No public transit is available in employees’ area of residence so alternatives are unavailable, the city should develop incentives for commuters outside of Chittenden County = 5
- City should increase enforcement of all traffic-related issues, including pedestrians, bicyclists, residents = 4
- Not applicable, employees do not work in the city downtown = 3

- The city should reevaluate parking ban and improve winter clearing, which reduces available winter parking = 3
- The city should increase transparency of signage, particularly on side streets to limit confusion/incentivize parking outside of downtown = 3
- Downtown city employees believe the parking situation is adequate = 3

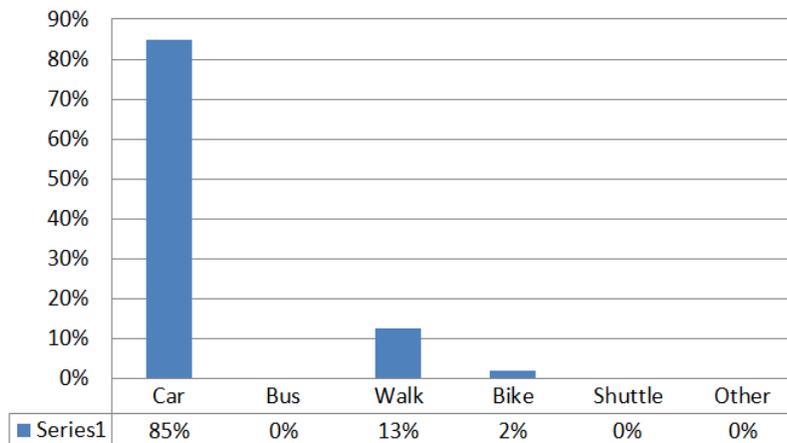
Consumer Survey Results

Number of Respondents = 345

Summary: Most of the consumer respondents lived outside of Montpelier, patronize downtown Montpelier frequently, and drive their cars when they do come to downtown Montpelier. More than half did not work in Montpelier. Most respondents felt there was a parking problem in downtown Montpelier and that parking does have some influence in their decision to patronize downtown Montpelier. When asked about signage directing people to parking the response was evenly split between those who thought there was not adequate signage and those who did not take notice.

- 68% of consumer respondents lived outside of Montpelier.
- Most of the respondents patronize downtown Montpelier frequently, 39% said they patronize downtown Montpelier several times a week, and 25% said it did so daily.
- Of the forms of transportation used when they travel to downtown Montpelier, 95% of consumer respondents said they travel by car, 41% said they walk, and 17% said they bike.
 - When asked which form of transportation was most frequently used, 85% said car, 13% said they walk, and 2% said they biked.

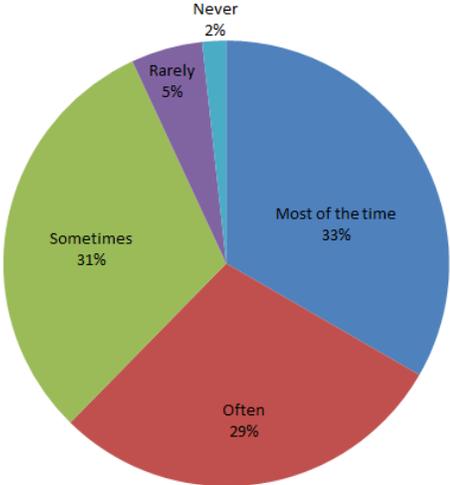
When you come to downtown Montpelier, what is your most frequent form of transportation?



- 54% of the consumer respondents said they did not work in Montpelier.

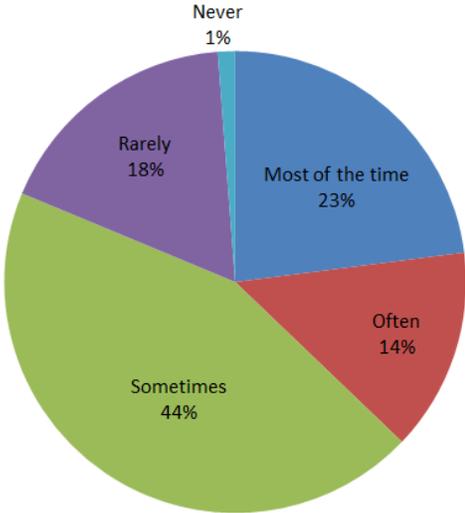
- Of those who did work in Montpelier, 48% said the most frequent way they get downtown from work is by car, 32% said they walk, and 16% said they worked downtown.
- 80% of consumer respondents said they thought there was a parking problem in downtown Montpelier.
- 65% said that parking does influence their decision about whether to patronize downtown.
 - When asked how often it influences their decision, 33% said most of the time, 31% said sometimes, and 29% said often.

Of respondents who said parking influenced their decision about whether to patronize downtown, how often did it influence their decision?



- When asked about the frequency of finding convenient parking, 44% responded sometimes, 23% responded most of the time, 18% responded rarely, and 14% responded often.

Respondent was able to find convenient parking in downtown Montpelier



- In an attempt to gauge how far people were willing to walk, a scenario was created. If your destination was City Hall, and you had to park by the library, was this considered acceptable? 60% of respondents said it was acceptable.
- 43% felt that signage directing people to parking was not adequate while 42% said they had never taken notice.

The survey provided consumer respondents the opportunity to provide comments, suggestions or concerns as it relates to the consumer parking experience in downtown Montpelier, of which 189 responses were received. From these, common themes were identified and given weight based on frequency. Many of the respondents had more than one comment, suggestion or concern and each was attributed to a corresponding theme. The following are those themes in order of frequency:

- Inadequate downtown parking is a direct cause for less consumer activity = 26
- Downtown city parking is too expensive and/or meter times are too short = 24
- The city has inadequate downtown parking, but no solution provided = 21
- The city should build a parking garage for general use = 19
- Downtown parking is not an issue = 15
- The city should address the issue of traffic safety for pedestrians and bicyclists = 14
- The city should offer free parking = 13
- The city should not add more parklets = 9
- The city should offer a parking lot and shuttle system for consumers with regular travel times and minimal stops to alleviate traffic = 8
- The downtown is not friendly to disabled/nearly handicapped consumers; additional short term parking should be created for disabled = 8
- City traffic and signage is the major issue and should be addressed as the city priority = 7
- The city should develop more incentives for alternative modes of transport to/from downtown (suggestions include opening private lots on weekends for public use, more bike racks and improved walking/biking trails, preferred parking for efficient vehicles) = 6
- The city should modify the parking ban, and improve snow clearing = 5
- The city should develop alternatives for downtown employees, including a parking lot and shuttle system = 4
- The city should offer more long-term parking (at least 3-4 hours) = 4
- The city should increase educational outreach about available parking areas outside of downtown to relieve congestion = 3
- The city should increase enforcement of all traffic-related issues = 3
- Downtown parking is only an issue when the legislature is in session = 2
- No reservation of parking spaces (public or private) should be permitted = 2
- City business employers should be responsible for addressing their own parking needs, it should not be a city issue = 2
- There should be no public parking available at the high school = 2
- The city should develop motorcycle-only parking = 1

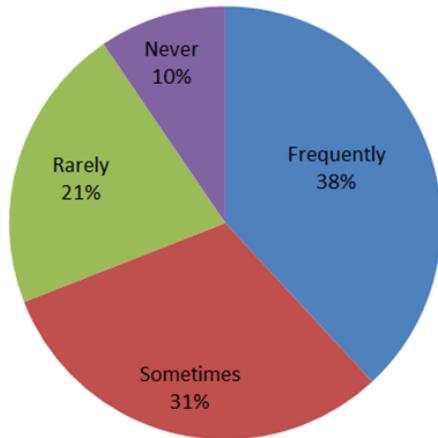
Employer Survey Results

Number of Respondents = 52

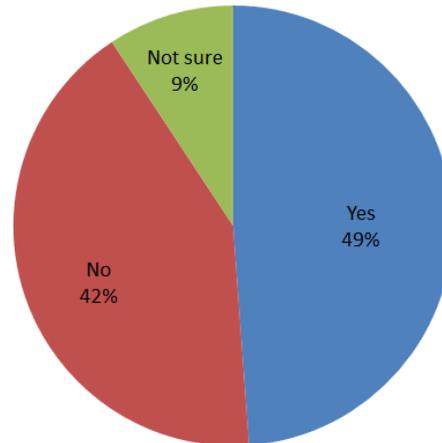
Summary: Most of the employer respondents represented businesses of 10 employees or less. More than half of employer respondents provide parking for at least some or all of their employees while 40% provide no parking. Most employer respondents said they do not provide incentives to their employees for taking the bus or using alternative forms of transportation, nor was there much interest in considering such incentives. Most of the employer respondents do not have parking specifically designated for customer parking. Almost 70% of employer respondents heard complaints about parking from their customers or clients sometimes or frequently.

- The first question asked was if the respondent owned operated, or managed a business in Montpelier. 86% (43) responded yes and 14% (7) responded no. (Note: The question also asked those who answered no, to not complete the survey).
- 62% of the employer respondents lived in Montpelier
- Most of the employer respondents were from small businesses. 72% represented businesses of 10 employees or less. Those representing businesses of 10-25 employees, 25-50 employees, and 75 or more employees, each represented 9% respectively.
- 40% responded they do not provide parking for any of their employees, 33% said they provide parking for all of their employees, and 24% said they provide parking for some of their employees.
 - Of those who do provide parking 52% lease spaces and 48% own the location of the parking.
- 92% do not provide incentives to employees who carpool, use public transportation or other alternative forms of transportation.
 - Further 61% said they were not willing to consider such incentives.
- 31% of employer respondents said they have designated customer parking.
- 70% of employer respondents felt there was a parking problem in downtown Montpelier.
- When asked how often customers or clients complained about the availability of parking downtown when trying to access their business, 38% said frequently, 31% said sometimes, 21% rarely, and 10% said never.
- Asked whether employer respondents felt that parking in Montpelier significantly impacted their business, 49% said yes, 42% said no, and the rest were unsure.
 - Of those that responded “yes”, 87% said the impact was negative.

How often have customers or clients complained about the availability of parking downtown when trying to access your business?



Do you feel that the parking situation in Montpelier significantly impacts your business?



The survey provided employer respondents the opportunity to provide comments, suggestions or concerns, of which 22 responses were received. From these, common themes were identified and given weight based on frequency. Many of the respondents had more than one comment, suggestion or concern and each was attributed to a corresponding theme. The following are those themes in order of frequency:

- Downtown parking is not adequate, no specific suggestion provided = 7
- The city should issue parking permits to businesses & employees/not penalize those a part of the downtown business community = 4
- Long term parking is the major issue, short term parking is adequate = 3
- No impact on my business, as it is not in the heart of downtown = 3
- The city’s experiment with parklets worsened existing parking restrictions = 2
- The city’s parking concern is only a perception, there is plenty of parking = 2
- The city should eliminate parking at DOL lot, as it is too far for consumers = 1
- The cost of parking is too high = 1
- Business should make private lots available by leasing private parking spaces = 1
- The city should increase meter rates to incentivize short term parking available for customers, rather than long term parking = 1

Conclusion

The parking committee hopes that the survey results will be seen as a tool not just for the Committee, but for the City Council as well. Many themes and ideas were identified in the survey that the committee plans to pursue. It is the plan of the parking committee to present a series of realistic and practical recommendations to the City Council based on thoughtful deliberation and research.