

Phase III - Parking Alternatives

A list of possible parking solutions was submitted to the South Grand Parking Steering Committee in September of 2002. Comments from resident and business groups were developed over a two-month period, with the Steering Committee submitting written comments on the outline of parking solutions to the planning team by November 4, 2002. The general consensus of the comments was to emphasize improvements to the large parking lot at Commerce Bank as the main source of supply for future parking needs for the area. The committee wants to “utilize as much as possible of the existing Commerce Site for enhanced parking”. Comments also included an emphasis on improvements to the other City owned lots that exist in the area.

Many solutions that proposed the creation of substantial quantities of parking and also required demolition of existing buildings or increased amounts of paving behind existing buildings were not approved by the Steering Committee. However, committee opposition was to specific parking solutions (specific buildings recommended for demolition, location of new parking, and/or the solution’s affects on adjacent uses) and not necessarily opposition to the general concept the solution proposed.

The usefulness of the Commerce Bank lot as the source supplying **all** of the parking needs for the Business District is questionable. Various businesses have negotiated with Commerce Bank to lease parking spaces on this existing parking lot with little success. Perspective tenants have typically rejected this as a viable solution and gone elsewhere. Customer surveys indicate a desire for a short walking distance to businesses. For businesses west of Grand Avenue, the Commerce Bank lot is perceived as being too far away to be attractive, especially for the 31,000 square feet of vacant space in City Block 2102, which includes nearly 15,000 vacant space in the Dickman Building.

The following solutions are shown in the original order first submitted in the draft outline, with each solution including the comments made by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee either Agreed or Disagreed with the solution and this is written in **bold** text for each solution. Comments made for each solution is written in *italicized* text. Some of the solutions are incorporated into the proposed solution drawings, and some include additional comments for consideration and additional review. Some solutions are not incorporated into the solution drawings, and are therein noted as not included.

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Policy Solutions

1. Change the street sweeping schedule to narrow the hours designated for sweeping the side streets adjacent to the Grand Business District. The City should give priority scheduling to an area with successful commercial activity, especially where parking is limited. Changing the schedule will be less expensive than building a parking garage. The schedule change could be between 8:00 am. and 9:00 am. on the days already designated rather than the current loss of an entire morning or afternoon schedule as currently exists.

The Steering Committee disagreed with this solution, stating:

The existing street sweeping schedule allows a three-hour window for service twice a month. Consensus was that this isn't worth changing. It was also suggested that street cleaning is a city service paid for by tax dollars.

This solution is not included in the drawings to increase the parking count for the area, though business owners did comment that on street sweeping days the competition for parking was at its most intense. Business owners also commented that customers complained about receiving tickets related to the street-sweeping schedule, even after the sweeping had already taken place. Narrowing the scheduled hours of the street sweeping schedule could be of future help to ease the parking problems in the South Grand Business District. A one-hour window of time for sweeping streets in a Business District seems to be a reasonable amount of time to complete this work.

2. Lower the meter fines if the ticketed person pays within 30 minutes to 1 hour of receiving the violation. This will lessen the penalty for the honest patrons who are slightly late getting back to the meter. This policy would be similar to the City of Clayton's parking meter ticketing policy for its downtown office and commercial area.

The Steering Committee agreed with this solution, and included the following suggestion:

A Board of Alderman action could be taken to allow lower fines for any area within the City if and only if the business district implements a strategy and service area to allow people to pay off their fines within the district boundaries. Through this additional clarification, the City would not have to absorb the additional cost, and the lost revenue would be lessened, since practically speaking, only limited areas would have the capacity to implement such a provision.

We think that lowering metering fines (#2) is a good idea but we do not know how many people could actually pay the fine within that time period. Something that is indirectly related would be the dropping of meter charges on weekends as is done in many other areas of the city. On the weekend many people get ticketed, as they must assume there is no meter charge on the weekend. This shock may discourage their frequency at which they visit the neighborhood. (resident comment)

This solution does not increase the actual number of parking spaces available in the area. This solution does address one of the negative aspects related to the heightened competition for parking in the South Grand Business District by lessening the fees for customers who miss getting back to their parking meter in time. The weekend changes are also a good idea to increase the competitive situation for retail businesses in the area. The Business Group should discuss these proposed changes in detail.

3. Change the residential trash collection to individual roll out carts for each homeowner rather than the large dumpsters. This will increase the available parking on the backs of the residential properties that currently carry the burden to provide space for the common dumpsters. A more detailed policy description will be provided later. The City operates using roll out carts for homeowners without alleys.

The Steering Committee disagreed with this solution, stating:

Consensus was that excess refuse and litter would move from the rear of properties to the street.

Residents like big dumpsters and DO NOT want roll-outs (resident comment)

This seems to assume that people would be parking in the alley where the dumpsters currently are. Wouldn't this impede traffic flow? The folks at the last TGHNA meeting love their dumpsters and don't want to get rid of them. Also, roll-out carts would work very well for multi-family buildings. (Steering Committee member comment)

The idea to change the residential trash collection (#3) would actually be counterproductive to the parking plan. That is, the presence of individual roll carts which need to be placed in the street take away from parking spaces and typically break up the available parking so that less than half is available. This would be every trash collection day for the entire day since most people would not pull them back into the gangways until the end of the working day. Evidence of this can be seen in any of the neighborhoods that currently use this system such as University City and Dog Town. In addition, the reality of how much parking is lost in the alley due to dumpsters is minimal. Parking in the place of where a dumpster is currently would not be possible as that vehicle would result in blocking of the common alley which people must travel through to get in/out of their parking areas. A small dumpster takes up much less space than the average car.(resident comment)

The strong attachment to the large alley dumpsters caused this solution not to be included in the parking solution drawings. Misunderstandings of this policy include: it is a solution intended only for single family and duplex buildings, roll out carts would face the alley and would be rolled out only on trash day, and by removing the large dumpsters from the back end of individual residential properties would free up some space for individual home owners to park on the back of their own lot rather than on the street in front of their house.

4. Change the Planning and Zoning Requirements to allow for 8'-6" wide parking spaces instead of 9'-0" wide spaces. Note, the City recently changed to 9'-0" parking spaces as part of a larger effort to standardize city codes to match standards used by St. Louis County.

The Steering Committee disagreed with this solution, stating:

Steering Committee agreed that it's not a good idea to make the size of parking spaces smaller. Far too many people drive large vehicles like SUVs, trucks and mini-vans. Instead, the Steering Committee suggests actually marking or striping the metered parallel parking spots on Grand and the side streets so that visitors know where to park. And that some metered on-street "compact car only" spots could be added. For example, having smaller cars only parked where the alley's parallel to Grand intersect with side street or where parking lots have curb cuts would allow better sight lines when cars are pulling into traffic.

The parking solution drawings designate parallel parking spaces at the intersections for “compact cars only.” This combined with the addition of the “curb bump outs” adds about one space per street corner. This has a minor effect on increasing the total number of spaces available on the street, but will also increase safety with the increased visibility for vehicles turning on to Grand from the side streets by not allowing large SUV’s and vans from limiting the views at street corners.

5. Change the bus stops to be at the north and south end of the business district. Keep the existing stops at Arsenal and Grand adjacent to Streetside for convenient transfers. Locate another pair of stops at the opposite corner (northwest) of this intersection again for ease in transfer from north-south route to east-west route on Arsenal. Both Arsenal stops currently exist, the only new stop is created at south bound Grand inside in the park, near the existing Arsenal stop in the park. At the south end of the business district, locate bus stops in front of the library (as currently exists) and in front of the parking lot adjacent to St. Pius Church (new north bound stop). Remove all other bus stops on Grand between Utah and Arsenal. This creates a maximum of a 5-minute walk between bus stops. This will remove 5 bus stops in the business district to provide at least 10 valuable new parking spaces on Grand Avenue.

The Steering Committee was undecided, and tended to disagree with this solution, stating:

Steering Committee agreed that this is something that needs to be very closely examined before making any changes to the current bus stops. Some suggestions: make sure there are more buses running when Roosevelt lets out. The bus stop going south bound at Wyoming doesn’t take up any parking spaces at all b/c the bus stops in the middle of the intersection for people to board and unboard. This is somewhat problematic with traffic, but otherwise good for parking. Can any of the other stops be change to mimic the Wyoming Southbound stop?

Bus stops should be very carefully reviewed and changed only to improve access to increase public safety and parking. (business comment)

Though bus stop locations need to be re-evaluated, fewer stops can not be the answer. The district’s history in working with Bi-State has been long. Until anyone considering this issue has been on the district between 2:00p – 3:15p. Monday – Friday throughout the school year, when literally 50 to 100 teenagers are congregating at each stop throughout the district due to school bussing; then contemplates when the business unfortunate enough to have the stop in front of them would be faced with doubling or tripling that number of kids through a reduction of stops; this issue can not be practically employed (Steering Committee member comment)

In an effort to moderate the comments made, the parking solution drawings show some of the bus stops removed, and some relocated. The total number of bus stops has been reduced from 9 to 8, but relocation of some stops appears to be advantageous to the Business District with little reduction of service. Conceptually, the bus stops in the Business District have been reorganized to be located in three general places – the north and south ends of the district, and at the blocks just north of the mid-point of the district (existing stops).

The Arsenal at Grand intersection is a transfer point for the four bus stops located here. A new bus stop is proposed at the southeast corner of Tower Grove Park (the other 3 stops are existing), where there is an opportunity to create a pedestrian entry gate with bus pavilions designed in keeping with the historic tradition of the many pavilions built around Tower Grove Park. This new gateway will have multi-functions. It will be a better, more appealing bus stop for passengers, while also providing a physical pedestrian link between events in the park and the action in the South Grand Business District. Grand entry gates have always been a part of the automobile entry into the park. This is the ideal location to emphasize a pedestrian connection between the park and the Business District and link special events to after event gatherings in the local restaurants and shops.

At the south end of the Business District, one northbound bus stop has been relocated to fill an existing No Parking zone along the front of the St. Pius parking lot. This creates three new parallel, metered spaces in front of the existing apartment building at 3250 Grand. The two existing stops at Juniata and Grand are shown to remain to address the volume issue of passengers waiting for the bus. These stops were seen as preferable since they were just south of the highest density of the Business District. The stops next to the law office at Humphrey and next to Amoco have been removed.

6. Consider a bus loop that connects the South Grand Business District directly to the hospitals to the north, to the Grand Avenue Metrolink stop, St. Louis University and the Grand Entertainment District further to the north. Increasing accessibility of public transit could decrease demand for some parking. This business district loop should be quick and not stop at every block along the route.

The Steering Committee agreed with this solution, incorporating the following suggestions:

The hospitals may be able to extend the loop they already run. Bi-State might not be receptive at a time when they're downsizing. St. Louis University already runs a bus—tie into them? Vince Schoemehl has been talking about running a tram between Grand Center and 44. Maybe we could convince him to extend the route a little farther south. (<http://www.thecommonspace.org/2001/06/editor.php>).

Clearly some synergy may be possible to link the many uses along the Grand Boulevard Corridor. Additional consideration could be made to link this bus route to multiple City business districts. A bus loop could be created that links all of the above uses on Grand to Cherokee Street, then to the Brewery, next would be Soulard, then Downtown (ballparks, Metrolink Stations, hotels), then west to the A.G. Edwards Campus, Harris Stowe College, and back to Grand Center and St. Louis University.

7. Disperse the ADA parallel parking spaces on Grand (currently 2 located by the pedestrian crossing in front of Babylon International).

The Steering Committee agreed with this solution.

The parking solution drawings show the addition of ADA parallel parking spaces along Grand and side streets, balanced with the locations of off-street parking lot ADA spaces.

8. Encourage employee parking to be stacked parking two or three cars deep. The St. Louis Wok at 3159 South Grand illustrates this example. Here nine cars are often parked on the back of this property configured three cars deep.

The Steering Committee agreed with this solution with the following conditions:

Stacked parking will be only for employees, only behind (commercial?) buildings, using the City's current Board of Adjustment process, and include suggestions or solutions to aesthetic concerns.

9. Set a policy for a public process where a limited number of sites identified in the final Parking Study, residential property owners that are directly adjacent to the back of the business district, can seek approval to pave more of their rear yards and lease parking spaces to the adjacent business owners.

The Steering Committee disagreed with this solution, stating:

Only want parking behind residential buildings that have been converted to businesses. Please suggest solutions to aesthetic concerns.

The parking solution drawings show the implementation of parking in the rear yards of many of the buildings that face side streets. This approach is done in a systematic way to illustrate the addition of parking in association with the intensity of used of the adjacent businesses on this specific block. The parking study suggests that flexibility will be of utmost importance to the usefulness of this solution. Parking behind these buildings is needed regardless of the use proposed inside the existing building, if the building is going to have a change to be retained (not demolished). See photos on the next page of City Block 2100, where much of the rear yards are already paved for private residential parking, which goes unused during most business hours. Flexibility in use would supply some additional parking for the business district.

The best example of this need for flexibility of building use is the logical residential use of the existing two duplex buildings and the one four family property directly west of the large apartment at the corner of Grand and Connecticut – City block 2099. One possible scenario for this redevelopment is that the owner of the existing apartment building could purchase each of these buildings over time, gradually increasing the total parking spaces for this residential apartment development. None of the existing 45 apartment units have rear yards, and only 24 parking spaces are currently provided for this very large building that also has ground floor retail. This larger residential project would nearly double the amount of parking spaces provided for this apartment development, and would link with the underutilized parking lot at the existing church on Wyoming Street. This building owner could remain focused on the core business – leasing and management of residential apartments. This redevelopment would be less likely if the developer was required to lease the existing detached buildings to small businesses. The marketability of business space fronting the side street is currently unproven, and would be better if building owners could gradually test this office rental market rather than mandate only office use.

The existing landscape standards for the business district should be implemented wherever the new parking lots are adjacent to existing residential uses. Privacy fences should be required (where none exist) to separate the new parking lots from residential back yards (reference solution #26 for additional information on this topic). Solution #9 differs from solution #26 in property ownership.



Most of the rear yards behind 3118 Juniata and 3619 Connecticut are already paved for parking.



10. The present architectural design standards in the business district's redevelopment plan should be strengthened to handle anything from small to large-scale projects. Projects proposed outside the current redevelopment area will have to seek rezoning to a Transitional Zone or seek altering (boundaries) of the Redevelopment Plan. Strict architectural standards should be included in a Transitional Zone for buildings to be built on these sites. Residents and business people should actively participate in the public hearings involved in any future change of zoning or expansion of the redevelopment area.

The Steering Committee disagreed with this solution, stating:

Architectural standards already exist in the Redevelopment Plan. And the Plan has no jurisdiction outside the District's boundaries. Outside of the District's boundaries, stick with City's current conditional use or Board of Adjustment process instead of creating a whole new Transitional Zone.

Judging from the comments, the design quality of new buildings is directly related to building demolition in that the residents of the area believe that new architecture is never as good as the existing buildings. This relates to the parking study in that changes to some of the existing buildings in the area are necessary to increase parking in the area. In the Short-Term Parking Solutions, demolition for parking lots is limited to a vacant commercial building and several garages. In the Long-Term Parking Solutions, some buildings in the area will need to be demolished to make room for the parking necessary to maintain the high level of quality of the Business District tenants. Higher quality, more specific design standards could make better guarantees that changes are more agreeable.

Resident comments during the parking study process indicate disappointment in the design of the Streetside-Bread Company buildings built in the late 1980's. Resident comments suggest that they believe there are strong architectural aesthetic codes required for the South Grand Business District. Copies of the existing redevelopment plans for the Business District (Project #23, dated 2-18-81, revised 3-25-86, and amended 5-24-89) and (Project #783 dated 5-28-96, amended 11-17-98) are included in the Appendix. Clearly by the numerous revision dates, the Redevelopment Plan for the area can be modified to expand the boundaries of the district or to tinker with the aesthetic codes.

Residents or any proponent of the historic architectural character of the Business District might be surprised by exactly how little architectural aesthetic controls are contained in the redevelopment codes. The design and landscaping of parking lots is well regulated, the results of which are visible in the parking lot created by The City Property Company at 3617 Hartford. This redevelopment to create a surface parking lot is done to the letter of the redevelopment plan guidelines. The existing Board of Adjustment process allows building demolitions as well. The original 1980's architectural redevelopment guidelines were clearly created for renovation of historic buildings, with little written in the code to describe the requirements of the architecture of new infill buildings. The section entitled "Façade Design" on page 14 contains a general description of how infill buildings should be designed.

The creation of more precise architectural design standards, especially for new infill buildings, may make it more palatable to allow the demolition of older buildings to create room for new infill building types to be built that provide more parking. One clear example of this new building type is the new infill building with ground floor retail and the upper floors structured parking. This more urban building type is shown in the parking solution drawings, and will be useful to limit the need for the more suburban approach of creating surface parking lots. Better regulating of the quality of the architectural aesthetics is key to implementing this infill approach with structured parking.

11. The City should strictly follow its Demolition Review Process including public participation for any demolition involving older buildings in or adjacent to the Grand Business District. When a demolition permit is applied for in the study area, the City should forward a copy to neighborhood organizations (neighborhood groups and business districts). The Demolition Review Process includes specific written requirement for architectural quality, condition of the structure, neighborhood effect, reuse potential and urban design. There should be specific written aesthetic requirements for building on a site approved for demolition. Landscape, fencing, and lighting standards should be enforced on all projects.

The Steering Committee agreed with this solution with no additional comments.