

GREATER HILLTOP AREA COMMISSION

**WEST BROAD STREET
PARKING COMMITTEE REPORT**

MARCH 2000

In February 1999, the Greater Hilltop Area Commission initiated a review of the availability, condition, and other issues affecting parking for customers of Hilltop businesses operating along the portion of West Broad Street located east of Hague Avenue. An ad-hoc committee, consisting of members of the Commission and community, was established to review the various commercial parking issues affecting the designated area and asked to report back to the Commission with its findings and recommendations. This report contains a summary of the Committee's process, and overview of its findings, and a set of recommendations aimed at increasing the number of parking opportunities for customers doing business with the affected commercial property owners and promoting the economic revitalization of this commercial district in a manner consistent with the pedestrian-oriented zoning requirements recently approved for much of this area.

In recent years, the economic development work of the Commission has been focused primarily on developing and supporting zoning requirements and neighborhood design guidelines that encourage pedestrian-friendly development of the commercial portion of West Broad Street located east of Hague Avenue. By this, the Commission has encouraged economic development projects that are similar in scale, mass, and density to existing structures located throughout the designated commercial business district. All the while recognizing, however, that some of the existing structures may not be functional for today's business development. Thus, allowing, where appropriate, the replacement of an existing structure with a more modern structure to suit the particular needs of the business owner but encouraging the placement and size of the new structure to blend with that of the remaining structures.

As a result of the Commission's recent economic development focus, customer parking has generally been restricted to the rear of most businesses with access limited to the use of the existing alleyway infrastructure. Support for this approach to economic development in the region bounded by Hague Avenue on the west and Highland Avenue on the east was supported by the City of Columbus when it designated the area a Commercial Overlay District in 1999. Included in the overlay district designation is a requirement that new structures be built at zero set-back from the street and that parking be restricted to the rear of all buildings. While the limitation of parking to the rear of buildings is consistent with the Commission's recent efforts to develop a more pedestrian-oriented commercial district, it does result in some difficulties for property owners of this commercial district that are subject to additional limitations concerning on-street parking in front of their businesses during peak travel periods. It is the Commission's intention and this report's purpose to identify alternatives for increasing the number of parking

opportunities for patrons frequenting businesses in this area of the Hilltop. Having successfully received commercial overlay designation for much of the commercial area east of Hague Avenue, it is now time for the Commission to focus its economic development attention on promoting parking solutions that encourage patronage of the Hilltop's central business district establishments within the context of the established pedestrian-oriented development approach.

METHODOLOGY

The West Broad Street Parking Committee was established by the Chair of the Greater Hilltop Area Commission in February 1999. It included members of the Commission and invitations were extended to the Greater Hilltop Community Development Corporation, other community organizations, and interested residents to participate in the Committee's work. Staff from the city traffic and parking and planning offices were asked and agreed to participate as advisors to the Committee.

The Committee held two meetings in 1999 to identify and examine current parking issues, discuss the availability and condition of existing parking, and develop a set of preliminary recommendations to enhance the economic vitality of the affected commercial business district. In the course of developing its preliminary recommendations, the Committee conducted its own research on the availability of existing parking and the condition of the current alleyway infrastructure to better determine the need. The Committee also reviewed the work previously done by the Neighborhood Design Assistance Center which identified key parking needs within the affected commercial district. Both documents are available for further review by contacting the Greater Hilltop Area Commission.

The preliminary recommendations were shared with members of the Greater Hilltop Area Commission in September 1999 and distributed to each of the affected commercial and residential property owners (i.e. those residing in homes at least three lots north or south of the alleyways running parallel to West Broad Street and located behind the affected commercial properties) in December 1999. Finally, the preliminary recommendations were also presented to members of the Hilltop Business Association at a luncheon meeting in January 2000 and the Hilltop Kiwanis at a regular meeting in February 2000 to solicit their feedback. As a result of this process, this version of the report has been drafted to reflect their suggested changes.

Although the Committee believes it has taken sufficient steps to ensure feedback from the appropriate people and organizations, it firmly believes the Commission should take a leadership

role in gathering additional community support for the proposed recommendations and seek their implementation with appropriate city officials.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations contained in this report are listed in order of priority. It is the Committee's belief that adopting the items in the order listed will have the most immediate and significant impact on securing the economic vitality of the affected commercial district and will encourage the revitalization of the remainder of the region. Having said this, the Committee believes the adoption of all recommendations must be vigorously pursued to ensure a comprehensive parking plan is developed for the region that will increase the likelihood for economic success.

Recommendation #1 - Restore On-Street Parking Between Highland and Clarendon Avenues. On-street parking for businesses located between Highland and Clarendon Avenues was restricted when the new state buildings for Public Safety and Transportation were opened on West Broad Street. At the time the buildings were completed, the portion of West Broad Street located between Highland and Clarendon Avenues was restriped to eliminate one eastbound lane and was replaced with a left turn lane into the new facilities. The change in traffic pattern was not fully discussed with the affected property owners and has created a hardship for existing businesses that relied upon on-street parking to provide easy day time access to its operations from patrons that are elderly or have physical disabilities. Although parking in the rear of the business operations provides some relief, access to the sites is limited by the automotive congestion caused by parents dropping and picking-up children who attend Highland Elementary School located immediately behind the subject property owners.

Restoration of on-street parking for established businesses operating between Highland and Clarendon Avenues is critical to maintaining the viability of these office-oriented operations.

Recommendation #2 - Permit On-Street Parking Along West Broad Street at All Times. Aside from the portions of West Broad Street where a parking lane does not exist (see recommendation #1), the hours of on-street parking are currently limited. The restricted hours currently include 7:00 am to 9:00 am traveling eastbound and 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm traveling westbound. The effect of the restricted parking hour policy is to limit access to the community's primary central business district operations during peak traffic periods. As a result, business owners are not able to capture this potential business market, which limits their growth opportunities and is a deterrent to other business owners establishing operations in the central business district.

The Committee recommends expanding the hours of on-street parking between Hague and Clarendon Avenues to all hours of the day, including peak traffic periods in the morning and evening. In order for this recommendation to be effective, business owners must restrict the use of parking in front of their establishments to patrons only. Without active enforcement of a patron-only on-street parking policy, employees of the business and tenants residing on the second level of many of the mixed-use commercial buildings in the district will limit the effectiveness of this recommendation.

For those concerned about traffic flow through the Hilltop during peak traffic hours, the Committee believes the availability of an alternative route (I-70) immediately north of West Broad Street provides a sufficient substitute to alleviate such concerns. The redirection of drive through traffic will likely increase the percentage of vehicles traveling West Broad Street that are occupied by residents of the neighborhood and are most likely to purchase the goods of services of affected business owners.

Recommendation #3 - Allow Parking Two Lots North or South of the Existing Alleyways for Developments that Strictly Adhere to the Commercial Overlay District Requirements.

A primary concern of the Hilltop business community during the development and approval of the commercial overlay standards and neighborhood design guidelines was the overall availability of on-site parking for developments in the central business district. The group argued that the size of the community's existing commercial lots, even with parking in the rear, would not allow for the construction of a functional facility while simultaneously providing the appropriate amount of parking for patrons.

In response to this concern, the Committee believes it may be appropriate for proposed developments to secure two lots deep (i.e. north or south) of the existing alleyways running parallel with West Broad Street behind the existing commercial buildings to be used for parking. The Committee recommends that this provision only be permitted when the proposed development adheres strictly to the approved commercial overlay district standards and when absolutely necessary to encourage the development in the portion of the Hilltop covered by this report. When used for parking, the Committee recommends that at least twenty-five feet of landscaping and fencing be used immediately adjacent to the affected residential properties to screen the parking from the neighbors. Moreover, the Committee does not recommend that the alleyway be vacated to allow for such developments. The existing alleyways are an important feature of the neighborhood's traffic pattern and are an integral part of community's vision for