



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA DOWNTOWN PARKING COMMITTEE

AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: July 9, 2015
TO: Downtown Parking Committee Members
FROM: Traffic Engineering Section, Public Works Department
SUBJECT: Valet Parking Policies

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Downtown Parking Committee receive a staff report regarding valet parking policies from the City's Supervising Transportation Engineer, and provide input to staff on options for Council consideration.

BACKGROUND:

The Santa Barbara Municipal Code is silent regarding valet operations in the public right of way. That means that valet operations are not specifically prohibited from happening on City streets. At the same time, City staff members do not have the authority to approve valet operations when requested.

This lack of policy and a supporting ordinance has created challenges in regulating and managing valet parking operations in Santa Barbara and safety and parking issues relating to valet operations.

Past Valet Requests

In November 1996, the City received a request from the Palace Café at 8 E. Cota Street for an on-street valet parking permit. The permit request was denied by a unanimous vote of the Council. Reasons cited include congestion/safety concerns, impacts to street parking and public parking lots, the ability to grant all valet requests (fairness), consistency with other City objectives, and staffing requirements.

Recent Developments

The Entrada hotel development on lower State Street is under construction and as part of the development agreement, the hotel will provide on-street valet parking services on East Mason Street. The hotel will also include a new parking garage. The upper levels of the garage will be dedicated to public parking, and the lower level will be used for valet parking storage associated with the on-street valet service on East Mason Street.

At numerous locations in downtown Santa Barbara, the Funk Zone, and on Coast Village Road, valet operators are operating on-street valet stands . These operations are typically in the evening, and are typically being operated for nearby restaurants, and are happening without the consent or oversight of the City. Some of valet operations conducted in the public right of way are also using public parking facilities supplies to store vehicles, either on-street or in a City-owned parked facility.

As a result of these issues related to valet parking in the public realm, staff recommends that on-street valet operations be regulated. Staff is not recommending the regulation of on-site valet parking.

Outreach

In 2014, City staff began an outreach effort to determine the role of valet parking operations on City streets. City staff reached out to a number of business groups and City Committees, including:

- Greater Santa Barbara Lodging and Restaurant Association
- Downtown Organization
- Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce
- Signature Parking
- Milpas Community Association
- Coast Village Road Association
- Transportation and Circulation Committee
- Downtown Parking Committee

The primary question that was asked to each group is whether or not valet parking should be allowed on City streets, and if so, whether or not valet parking operators should be allowed to utilize public parking facilities for vehicle storage. The feedback received was mixed. The organizations representing business groups generally felt that offering valet parking could benefit local businesses, and should be allowed. The City Committees were not as supportive. While some City Committee members could support on-street valet operations, no City Committee members support using the on-street public parking supplies for vehicle storage. Some perceived a fairness issue because the Entrada development will include valet parking. During the outreach process, it was also pointed out that the Entrada development will include over 80 public parking spaces, which more than offsets the on-street spaces being utilized for valet operations.

Another fairness issue that was noted in the process was that some businesses in Santa Barbara do not have street frontage that could accommodate valet parking (i.e. much of State Street).

DISCUSSION:

Staff will be discussing the valet parking with the Planning Commission on July 16, 2015. Prior to taking it to the Planning Commission, staff is seeking input from the Downtown Parking Committee since the committee plays an important role in the use of the parking

supply downtown. The Planning Commission plays a valuable role in advising City Council on community compatibility issues. On-street valet parking operations could alter the character of Santa Barbara and the park once policy currently governing Downtown parking. Staff intends to draft an ordinance consistent with the recommendation of the Planning Commission which includes the input received from the Downtown Parking Committee, for presentation to the Ordinance Committee of the City Council this fall.

Potential Benefits of Valet Parking and a Regulated Valet Program

Use of Otherwise Empty Private Parking Lots

Valet operators can enter into agreements with owners of private parking lots for vehicle storage. These parking lots may otherwise sit empty during certain times of the day. An example is a valet operator storing vehicles during evening hours at a nearby office building parking lot. By using these private parking lots, the overall supply of parking is increased.

Maximize Utilization of Private Parking Lot Space

Because valet operators have control of all the vehicles in the parking lot, they are able to stack vehicles more tightly than individual drivers. This also increases the supply of parking.

Convenience to Customers

By providing valet parking, businesses have the potential to attract more customers, helping these local businesses to be more successful. Disabled or elderly customers can benefit from not having to travel as far along the sidewalk system to reach their destination. Customers can count on being able to find convenient parking.

Regulation

By regulating valet parking, a number of observed issues can be better addressed, including:

- Vehicle storage location (i.e. storage in the public right of way, or in private parking lot)
- Double parking
- Parking in red/no parking zones
- Parking in bicycle lanes
- Multiple valet zones in close proximity
- Size/style and placement of valet stand and signs
- Driver behavior
- Scare off tactics (occupying parking spaces to keep them available for valet use)

- Public protection from unregulated/uninsured valet operators
- Adequate staffing, minimize on-street queuing

Potential Impacts of Valet Parking

Santa Barbara Community Compatibility

Valet parking somewhat diverges from the “park once” policy of operating Downtown parking. The park once strategy was developed to create parking efficiency, reduce traffic and create a walking-oriented downtown where people walk by, and hopefully patronize, local businesses. Whereas valet parking promotes a single business where people drive in and drive out. Although relatively small now, valet parking growth could begin to shift the culture of Downtown over time regarding how people access Downtown businesses. By using valet parking, people may avoid the experience of walking Downtown and engaging with people in the public realm and other business. Although people may disagree on whether this is a bad or good change from traditional Santa Barbara Downtown business access, it’s important to consciously consider the possible outcomes.

Some Santa Barbara land use policies have been purposely tailored to discourage auto use. For example, the amount of parking spaces required within the central business district is intentionally less than parking demand to create a parking deficit. While the public parking district offsets the parking shortage, it is priced parking, which discourages employee use. This policy reduces traffic congestion and increases use of alternative transportation. Another example is the City’s ordinance to prohibit land use drive-through businesses, which was done for air quality as well as traffic congestion reasons. Drive-through businesses can and do influence people’s trip decision making to favor driving to a certain location.

Reduction of On-Street Parking Spaces

Valet stands typically occupy one or two on-street parking spaces that could otherwise be used by the public. The argument can be made that if valet storage takes place in private parking lots, the overall quantity of parking increases.

Local valet operators have been observed storing vehicles on-street, which can reduce the amount of parking available for other nearby businesses and the public in general. Even if a valet ordinance is written to make this illegal, it will be challenging and costly for staff to inspect and enforce against this.

The argument can be made that the same people utilizing valets would occupy these on-street spaces anyway.

Impacts on Downtown Parking Facilities

Local valet operators have been observed utilizing Downtown Parking Facilities. One concern raised by Downtown Parking staff is the practice of ticket-switching. Santa

Barbara's Downtown Parking facilities offer the first 75 minutes free of charge. Local valet operators have been caught switching tickets when entering and exiting the parking facilities to minimize parking charges.

The overall impact to parking supply is likely neutral, although individual parking facilities may be impacted depending on proximity to valet stands.

Traffic Operations/Safety Concerns

On-street valet stands have the potential to cause queuing into traffic lanes, which is a safety concern, particularly on busier streets. Also, by providing this service within the public right of way adjacent to moving traffic, there is the potential for increased conflicts as opposed to these activities taking place on private property.

City Staff are not aware of any recent collisions involving valet operations. Local valet operators have been observed double parking, parking in red-curb zones, and parking in bicycle lanes.

Driver/Operator Behavior

Valet operators typically aim to provide good customer service, which means parking and retrieving vehicles quickly, and possibly operating outside good pedestrian and driving skills. It should be noted that to date, Public Works is not aware of any incidents involving valet operators in Santa Barbara.

Valet operators have been observed employing scare-type tactics at certain valet stands in Santa Barbara by telling members of the public they are not allowed to use certain on street parking spaces. Staff is concerned about space within the public right of way becoming viewed as private.

The valet parking stands may project a feeling of exclusivity, and that not all members of the public are welcome.

Fairness

The Entrada hotel development is under construction near the intersection of State Street and Mason Street. As part of the development agreement, Entrada will operate valet parking on the 00 block of E. Mason Street, next to the hotel entrance. Vehicles will be stored in the hotel parking garage. Included in the hotel parking garage will be over 80 parking spaces available to the public. So the number of parking spaces displaced by the valet stand is made up in the garage. Entrada's on-street valet parking operation may be perceived as unfair by other businesses.

Regardless of the outcome of this ordinance development process, the City is obligated to permit on-street valet parking by Entrada.

Management of an On-Street Valet Parking Program

Some of the issues mentioned above can be addressed through regulation, such as providing an adequately sized valet stand and staffing levels to minimize on-street queuing. Staff is concerned that establishing a permitting system for on-street valet parking will require routine inspections and potentially enforcement, which will require additional manpower effort to perform these tasks.

Even with additional manpower, inspections would likely be periodic, leaving the potential for undesirable activities between inspections, and the need for enforcement.

COASTAL ZONE:

Planning staff have indicated that any approved valet parking operation in the Coastal Zone will require a Coastal Development Permit.

The Coastal Commission staff is aware of and concerned about valet parking in the Funk Zone. On-street and off-street valet operations have occurred in the Funk Zone, as well as on Coast Village Road. Both types of valet operations have resulted in the valet operator's use of public parking supplies to store vehicles. Coastal Commission staff believes this practice to be inconsistent with the Local Coastal Plan because restaurant operators are using the public parking for private interests.

ALTERNATIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Prohibit On-Street Valet Parking Except for Special Events

One alternative is the prohibition of on-street valet parking operations, except for special events and adjacent to Entrada. In addition to larger special events that may request on-street valet parking, valet can be useful for private parties in residential areas.

This alternative would go against the feedback received from local business groups.

This alternative would address concerns about allowing on-street valet parking, including:

- Community compatibility,
- Reduction of on-street parking supplies,
- Traffic safety concerns,
- Valet operator behavior,
- City management of an on-street valet parking program.

B. Prohibit On-Street Valet Parking With No Provision For Special Events

(Similar to alternative A), without a provision for accommodating special events.

C. Establish A Valet Parking Program

Another alternative is to develop a valet parking program to regulate on-street valet parking in Santa Barbara. This alternative would include a permitting or licensing system, and would place operational requirements on valet operators. Such requirements would likely include:

- Insurance requirements
- Relationship requirements and concurrence from neighboring businesses
- Vehicle storage requirements
- Valet stand and valet signs size and placement requirements
- Minimum spacing for valet stands
- Accommodating other passenger loading within valet zones
- Rate restrictions
- Adequate staffing to prevent on street queuing.

Staff would also develop a fee structure that would include compensation for period inspections and enforcement, and an enforcement strategy for non-compliant operations (i.e. monetary penalties or revocation of permit).

D. Establish A Universal Valet Service

Another alternative is to establish a universal valet service, similar to that in Downtown Pasadena. With this alternative, a single valet operator would operate multiple valet stands in business districts, and be accountable directly to the City. Other valet operations would be prohibited. Patrons could drop their vehicles off at one valet stand, and arrange to have their vehicle picked up at a different stand. The positive aspects of valet parking can be included in such a program, such as increased convenience to customers, and increased utilization of private parking lots.

This alternative could address some of the potential impacts associated with valet parking for an individual business, including:

- Conflicts with the “Park Once” policy. Because valet stands would be universal, as opposed to being associated with one specific business, there is less of a conflict with the City’s “Park Once” policy.
- Enforcing rules regarding utilizing on-street parking spaces, valet operator behavior, and safety can be more effectively addressed if the operator is working for the City, and not for a private business.

The feasibility of this idea has not been explored. If directed, staff will look into further into this alternative.

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