



Exeter Parking & Traffic

2018 Survey Results



Why the Survey Was Done

Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) and the Town of Exeter jointly issued the Exeter Parking and Traffic Survey from July 16 to July 28, 2018 to capture a snapshot of perceptions around the issues of parking and traffic in downtown Exeter. The results of the survey are intended to be one piece of Exeter's discussion about parking and traffic issues downtown. The survey results may be used to guide future action by the Town of Exeter.

RPC conducted this survey in part to pilot a new public outreach software. This survey was conducted at no charge to the Town of Exeter.

How the Survey Was Done

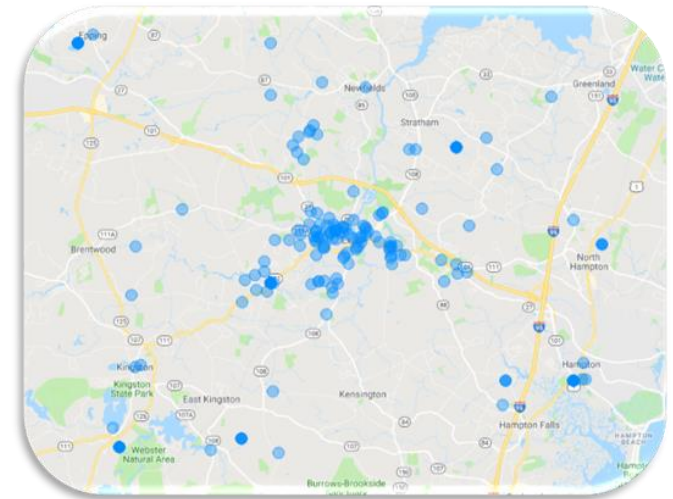
The survey was conducted via a website between July 16, 2018 and July 28, 2018. The survey was advertised through social media, including municipal accounts, posted on the Town of Exeter and RPC websites, and via multiple email distribution lists. During the weekly Exeter farmers market, patrons had the opportunity to take the survey on tablets.

The survey asked 18 general questions about parking and traffic with some questions consisting of multiple parts. The survey was viewed over 5,000 times and 862 individuals participated and filled out at least some of the questions and 341 respondents provided 772 written comments in addition to answering the questions. A total of 146 individuals provided their email address for future parking and traffic information in downtown Exeter.

Where to Get the Survey Data

The full survey results and comments be viewed at: <https://publicinput.com/ExeterParking>

A file of survey data and comments will be provided to the Town of Exeter in Excel and PDF format.



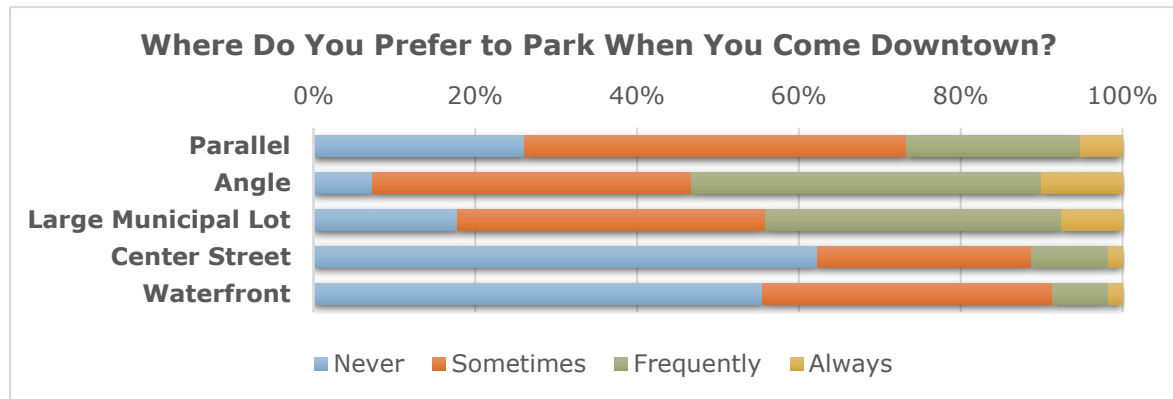
Distribution of Survey Participants

Survey Findings

How Many Public Parking Spaces Are There?

The first survey question asked how many public parking spaces respondents believed were in the downtown (see map on last page). The question was intended to gauge perceptions and provided immediate feedback by showing the user the correct answer. Most that answered the question (830) underestimated the amount of parking substantially, and many of the 160 comments were surprised at the actual amount. However, **the amount of parking available becomes irrelevant if people do not know where it is located**, or it is perceived as “always full” which is reflected in many comments.

675
66% assumed there are 350 spaces or less

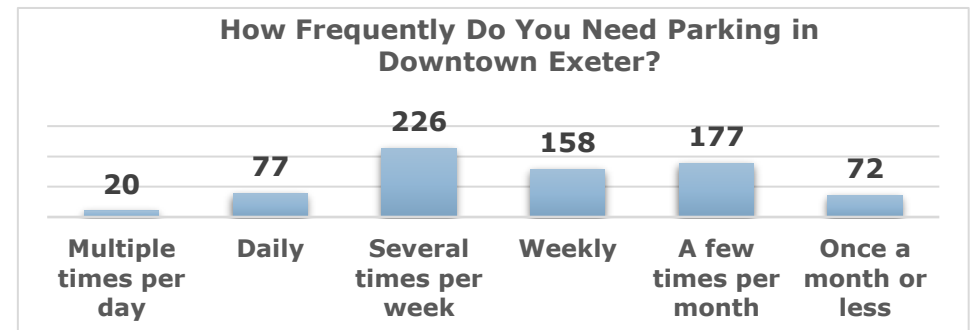


Willingness to Walk

Over 70% of participants parking for less than one hour are willing to park more than a two-minute walk away from their destination. Those that need more than four hours of parking are less willing to walk: 39% stated they prefer to walk less than two minutes away from their destination, but only **7% of participants park for more than four hours.** In short, most people are willing to walk even if they are only in Exeter for a short time.

Park Downtown

Participants were asked to choose up to three times of day that they most frequently need parking downtown resulting in over 1200 responses for which selection order can be examined. Nearly 500 participants selected multiple time periods, and overall the **afternoon (1:00–5:00 PM) and evening (5:00–7:00PM) were when most people need parking.** The most popular day to park in downtown was Saturday, with Sunday and Monday being the least popular days to park downtown.



Amenities

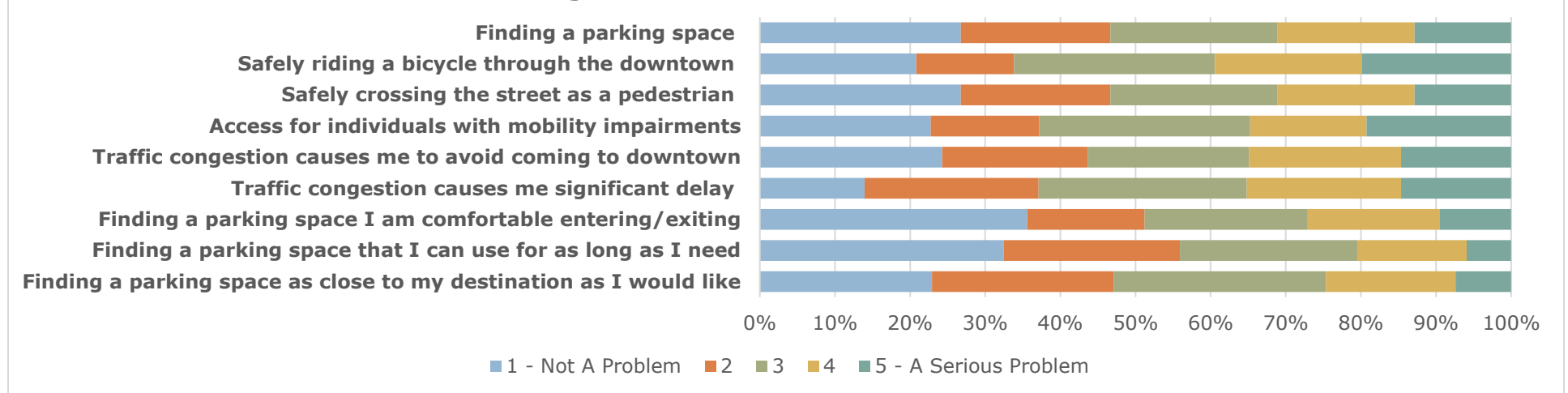
Participants indicated several amenities they were interested in having downtown. **Having sidewalk seating available for restaurants and cafes received the most interest (86%)**, with more benches also being popular (78%). The amenities least supported or respondents being indifferent about were cellphone and electric vehicle charging stations (70% and 69%), and adding bike tire pumps (77%). The most commented on amenity was to increase the number of trash receptacles, specifically near Swasey Parkway.

Major Concerns

Participants generally found **traffic congestion downtown to be their biggest concern** (35% rating a 4 or higher). Safety issues were also concerns with 40% of participants feel biking through downtown was a serious concern and 35% felt access for individuals with mobility issues was a concern. **Two-thirds of participants indicated finding parking and associated concerns as neutral or not a problem.**

Yes, Please!	Maybe?	No Thanks, Not Needed!
Sidewalk seating for restaurants and cafes	More dog waste receptacles	Cellphone charging station
Maps of shops, restaurants, etc.	Improved street lighting	Electrical vehicle charging station
Additional benches	Additional landscaping	Water feature in the pocket park
	Additional bike racks	Tire pump for bikes

Parking & Traffic Issues In Downtown Exeter



Possible Solutions

Better Signs & Wayfinding

Multiple comments indicated that self-identified “long-time” residents were not aware of all of the parking options in the downtown area. The addition of signage identifying publicly available parking lots would be helpful. Many comments also indicated confusion about when parking was allowed or not when a businesses or offices are closed.

“The angled parking spaces are very challenging to back out of - at some point you just have to cross your fingers and go (especially if you’re parked next to an SUV or pickup truck) oncoming travel does not slow or stop for people [making] backing up difficult.”

Build A Parking Garage

A common recommendation from survey participants was to build a parking garage on the municipal parking lot behind the Town Offices. Many respondents also indicated not wanting such a garage. Building a parking garage is typically an expensive option for increasing parking availability, however, the financing options and economic impacts may offset upfront costs.

The City of Dover built a municipal garage in 2016 with 321 parking spaces. The total cost to build was \$11 million or \$34,000 per space. Currently, parking cost a dollar per hour during weekday business hours. Additional detail on Dover’s garage development is available at:

<https://www.dover.nh.gov/government/city-operations/police/new-police-facility/index.html>

“I’ve lived in Exeter all my life and I had no idea there were three designated municipal lots. ...[b]ut there are always spots on the street, whether it be store front, bandstand, river lot, etc. However, I could possibly understand how it may be difficult for a visitor to know the other spots to park.”

Change On-Street Parking

A common concern from survey participants was the parallel and angled parking in downtown. Many find it difficult to pull in or out of the angled parking along Water Street, with a common concern regarding the narrowness of spaces. Many also indicated the roadways becoming very narrow in areas where there is parallel parking on both sides of the street, especially in the winter.

Widening or eliminating certain parking spaces may be a solution in key areas but should be done in conjunction with parking improvement measures (such as creating new parking areas or increasing parking turnover through the use of parking meters).

Did you know Exeter had parking meters in 1968?

Revenue generated was over \$16,000, or about \$118,000 today.



Improve Safety & Access

Many participants identified safety as an area in need of improvement for all users. The mix of a narrow street, many parked cars, moving vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians can create a congested atmosphere at times with disrupted traffic flow. Strategic removal of parking spaces at the narrowest points might allow additional space for vehicles and bicycle traffic as well as increase visibility for pedestrians at crosswalks. The Water Street crosswalk with the bulbouts adjacent to the bandstand has reduced the crossing distance and improved visibility for pedestrians, and similar improvements are needed at the other crosswalks, particularly across Water Street by the Citizens Bank.

“Pedestrian safety is an issue. Too many people crossing between cars, too few cars stopping for pedestrians in cross walks, and too many bikes on sidewalks. ”

“I don't love the angle-in parking, I'm always worried that someone will hit me backing out. ”

Angle-in parking is very efficient in that it allows a larger number of spaces than parallel parking and faster entry which limits the disruption of traffic flow from the parking maneuver. However, leaving angle-in parking is challenging as drivers have difficulty observing approaching traffic and ensuring that they are not backing into something or someone, and cyclists are most vulnerable in this situation. Back-up cameras have made this process somewhat safer, but the maneuver remains challenging. Reconfiguring to reverse angle parking retains the current spatial efficiency, is easier than parallel parking, and has the added benefit of improved safety by eliminating the backing out maneuver that results in so many collisions and is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

Ease Traffic Congestion

With multiple converging state highways and limited access points across the Exeter River, the downtown experiences a substantial amount of traffic daily. The most recent counts from NHDOT (2017) indicate that Water Street averages over 17,000 vehicles per day near the Great Bridge, and Front Street sees close to 15,000 vehicles per day. When these volumes are combined with bicycle and pedestrian traffic and parking maneuvers, it creates short-term congestion and disruptions in the flow of traffic. At the same time, these disruptions in flow keep vehicles moving slowly which has a safety benefit. There were many suggestions offered by participants to reduce congestion, including removal of some parking in the narrowest areas such as in front of St. Anthony's Bakery and on Water Street closest to the Great Bridge, one-way circulation utilizing Pleasant Street and the String Bridge, improving pedestrian crossings and encouraging more pedestrians to use them, changing the circulation around the Bandstand, and many others.



Recommendations

Conduct a Parking Utilization Study

Most survey participants (>90%) underestimated the amount of parking available in the downtown area (see map on following page). It was also clear that many people were not aware of all the available parking areas. Several comments indicated that it did not matter how many spaces there were because the perception is that there is little parking available when people want it.

A parking utilization study was conducted by the Exeter Chamber of Commerce and Rockingham Planning Commission in 2001/2002 found the demand for parking was near the supply during peak periods (roughly 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM), especially in the municipal lots. However, outside of those times there was generally substantial parking available with an overall utilization rate of just under 60 percent. Since 2002, the mix of businesses and other uses in the downtown has changed substantially and a new evaluation would help to understand how demand has changed given that the supply has stayed relatively static over that same period.



Where do you like to park?

Explore Opportunities to Manage Demand

The addition of multiple new restaurants in the downtown (and plans for more), along with other activities has seemed to increase evening activity in the area. It is possible that extending hours of some other businesses into the evenings may shift some of the demand from mid-day/afternoon to the evening and reduce the demand during the current peak periods. A starting point would be to extend hours on Saturday and Expand to Friday and Thursday if successful.

Investigate Options for Shared Parking

Private spaces that can be used by the public during non-business hours provide a way to meet demand with minimal investment. Bank parking lots are one common shared space as they generally are closed in the evenings and Saturday afternoons when demand is high for public parking spaces. Public building and school parking lots can also be used in a similar manner outside of normal operating hours. The town should explore opportunities to partner with other entities to use existing private spaces in the downtown area when they are not needed.

Improve Wayfinding

Wayfinding is a general term used to describe the different ways that individuals navigate between spaces and orient themselves in a physical setting. Communities can improve wayfinding by establishing a predictable and consistent identity that reinforces a sense of place and promotes the area as one that is easy to navigate. There are several ways to improve wayfinding but, a well-designed and comprehensive signage system can provide that consistency at a relatively low cost. (Exeter already has some wayfinding signage, however, many participants noted signs should be improved.) Implementing a wayfinding program can reduce the amount of circulation that occurs as visitors look for parking as well as improve people's interest in walking as they better understand how close they are to their destination. The City of Portsmouth has recently implemented a comprehensive wayfinding plan that provides a well-designed and structured model for the Town of Exeter to emulate (<http://www.cityofportsmouth.com>).

Address Congestion

The congestion that is experienced in downtown Exeter is both an indicator of a strong economy as well as an intermittent problem that can be addressed strategically. Opportunities to create a more consistent flow of traffic flow through downtown must also be balanced with the need to keep speeds low to ensure pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Some options for further examination and discussion include:

- **Understand Traffic flow and circulation:** Answering the questions regarding how much of the traffic in the downtown is through traffic, as well as the ultimate destinations of those passing through may provide more insight on effective methods to reduce congestion. This should include analysis of the traffic signals on Portsmouth Avenue as there may be opportunities to address congestion by changing traffic flow on that facility.
- **Removal of Parking Spaces from Water Street:** Calculated removal of parking spaces at the narrowest points on Water street would allow more room for vehicles to maneuver and reduce stoppages and should be studied further. Eliminating the parallel parking entirely, or from one side of the street in those areas would further aid in smoothing flow at the cost of fewer on-street parking spaces and may be a reasonable trade-off if the parking can be replaced elsewhere.
- **Improve Bicycle and Pedestrian Environment:** The recent sidewalk replacement, the addition of benches and bike racks, and the painting of "sharrows" to indicate that cars and bicycles should share the roadway, have all made visible improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle environment in the downtown. The town should continue to implement improvements that encourage downtown trips by these modes and reduce the amount of motor vehicle traffic. Future considerations should include enhancing the pedestrian and bicycle connections between the downtown and Portsmouth Avenue, and between the downtown and Lincoln Street.
- **Circulation Changes:** The idea of one-way circulation utilizing Pleasant Street and the String Bridge has been used as temporary routing during construction and has shown that it can be successful from the perspective that it moved traffic smoothly. That being said, any changes to traffic circulation that are intended to be permanent should be studied thoroughly and discussed publicly to ensure that the benefits and costs are fully understood.



