

# TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

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To: Mayor and Trustees, Village of Great Neck Plaza  
From: Level G Associates, Parking Consultants  
Re: Downtown Parking Analysis  
Village of Great Neck Plaza, NY  
Date: April 13, 2015

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## **Introduction & Purpose of Assignment**

The Village of Great Neck Plaza (VGNP or Village) has a classic downtown with a diverse mix of users competing for the most convenient parking spaces. Achieving the correct mix of long term, short term and permit parking in the various parking facilities located throughout the Village is a challenging balancing act.

The purpose of this assignment is to meet with Village officials and stakeholders, make observations of the format and utilization of the municipal parking supply, and to make recommendations designed to improve parking conditions in the Village.

## **Meetings**

In the summer and fall of 2014 Level G Associates met with Village officials to obtain an overview of the municipal parking system and conducted several days of field observations in the downtown business district. We also met with representatives of the Business Improvement District and Chamber of Commerce to report our general observations and to hear their thoughts and concerns about parking. These meetings took place on October 9, 2014 and November 12, 2014, respectively.

Finally, we presented our preliminary findings and recommendations to the Village board on December 3, 2014 to obtain their thoughts and feedback.

## **Municipal Parking Supply**

According to Village documents downtown VGNP has 1,622 parking spaces broken down as follows:

435	On-street metered parking spaces with a 2 hour limit
460	Off-street metered parking spaces with a 4 hour limit
727	Off-street parking spaces for permit holders

*On-street meters (435 total spaces)*

On-Street meters are in effect from 9AM to 6PM Monday through Saturday, except holidays. The metered spaces are regulated with single space conventional parking meters and the fee is 25¢ per hour. All metered spaces have a two hour parking time limit. Each meter face is outfitted with a button that when pushed registers 5 minutes of free parking for customers who need to get change for the meter or only require a quick “in and out” visit.

A number of on-street metered spaces operate as 30-minute limit loading zones between the hours of 7AM and 2PM. These same spaces revert to 2-hour limit parking after 2PM.

*Off-street meters (460 total spaces)*

Off-street metered parking is available in six (6) village parking facilities broken down as follows:

Facility	Metered Parking - Single Space Meters	Metered Parking - Multi Space (Muni) Meters
Maple Drive Parking Lot	4-Hour Limit	
Grace Avenue Parking Lot		4-Hour Limit
Gussack Plaza Parking Lot		4-Hour Limit
Great Neck Road / Atria Lot	2-Hour Limit	
Plaza Centre Parking Garage	2-Hour Limit or 10-Hour Limit (with Special Permit)	
Maple Drive Parking Garage	4-Hour Limit	

The hourly rate for parking in these off-street metered parking areas is identical to the on-street meter rate, 25¢ per hour.

*Permit Parking (727 total spaces)*

Permit parking is available in the Maple Drive Parking Garage, the Plaza Centre Parking Garage, and the Great Neck Road / Atria Lot.

According to the Village, three different types of permits are available: 1) Commercial Permits for Employers and their Employees who work in the Village for \$90 per quarter; 2) Commuter Permits for non-Village residents at \$210 per quarter; and 3) Plaza Centre Garage Rooftop Permits for \$5 per quarter that allows seasonal and part-time Employees who work in the Village to pay for parking on an “as needed” daily basis using 10 hour meters on the roof of the Plaza Centre Garage.

## **Field Studies**

Field observations were generally conducted between 10AM and 3PM on mid-week days when schools were in session in September and October of 2014. The following studies were undertaken:

- Parking space occupancy and turnover study of on-street metered spaces along Middle Neck Road between South Station Plaza / Great Neck Road and Cedar Drive on Thursday September 18;
- Parking space occupancy and turnover study of the Gussack Plaza parking lot on Thursday October 30;
- Parking space occupancy and turnover study of the Grace Avenue parking lot on Thursday October 30; and
- Periodic occupancy counts of the municipal parking supply.

## **Parking Conditions**

Great Neck Plaza has an attractive and busy downtown district where there is apparent and significant competition for convenient parking. For parking planning and design purposes short term parking areas that are at least 90% occupied are considered “full” due to the constant in-flow and out-flow of cars. On-street metered parking areas in VGNP plus those in the Gussack Plaza and Grace Avenue parking lots were found to be occupied in excess 90% during most observation periods between 11:30AM and 2:30PM.

### *Middle Neck Road*

Attachment No. 1 shows the results of on-street meter studies conducted along the Village’s main commercial corridor, Middle Neck Road. The following conditions were determined:

- The 92-space parking supply between South Station Plaza and Cedar Drive was occupied in excess of 90% between 12:30 and 2:00PM;
- A number of block sides reached a saturated condition as they were observed to be occupied at or in excess of 100%;
- In general, the west side of Middle Neck Road exhibited higher occupancy rates than the east side;
- On average, each parking space turned over 3.0 times in the 3.5 hour period between 10:30AM and 2:00PM;
- Thirteen (13) cars were observed to have violated the 2 hour posted time limit;

- The 16-space block with Best Bagels had 4 spaces occupied in excess of 2 hours meaning 25% of the parking on this block was impacted by low or no parking turnover on this particular day;
- The 15-space block with Sportset and the 15-space block with Pinkberry each had 20% of their spaces impacted by “over 2 hour” parking durations;
- At least 84% of all cars parking along Middle Neck Road were parked for 90 minutes or less.

In addition, based on our observations of car movements it is estimated that ½ of the cars parking on Middle Neck Road between 91 minutes and 2 hours are actually long term (possibly local employee) parkers who will re-park their car at a different “short term” parking space. Similarly, we estimate that 80% of the cars parking in excess of 2 hours are engaged in this same activity. Overall, it is estimated that between 10% and 15% of the cars parked along Middle Neck Road at any time during a typical day are long term (possible local employee) parkers.

#### *Gussack Plaza Lot*

Attachment No. 2 shows the results of occupancy and duration studies conducted at the 4-hour limit Gussack Plaza parking lot. The following conditions were determined:

- The 100-space parking supply was occupied in excess of 96% between 11:30AM and 2:30PM;
- The lot experiences periods of congestion between 12 noon and 2PM with potential parkers waiting in the driving aisles for parking spaces to become available;
- 2 out of 3 cars (67%) were parked in this lot for less than 1 hour and 3 out of 4 cars (75%) were parked in this lot for less than 2 hours.

It is estimated that 25 out of 253 cars using this lot between 9:30AM and 2:30PM are actually long term (possibly local employee) parkers who will re-park their car at some other location. This activity created an unbalanced parking utilization in the lot where 75 spaces handled 209 parking transactions and the remaining 25 spaces handled only 44 parking transactions.

#### *Grace Avenue Lot*

Attachment No. 3 shows the results of occupancy and duration studies conducted at the 4-hour limit Grace Avenue parking lot. The following conditions were determined:

- The 125-space parking supply was occupied in excess of 97% between 11:30AM and 2:30PM;

- The lot experiences periods of congestion between 12 noon and 2PM but the extent of the congestion was generally less than similar congestion observed at the Gussack Plaza lot during the same time period;
- 2 out of 3 cars (67%) were parked in this lot for less than 2 hours and 82% were parked in the lot for less than 3 hours.

It is estimated that 30 out of 274 cars using this lot between 9:30AM and 2:30PM are actually long term (possibly local employee) parkers who will re-park their car at some other location.

### **Results of Meetings With BID and Chamber of Commerce**

As mentioned earlier, we met with members of the Village BID on October 9, 2014 and members of the Chamber of Commerce and November 12, 2014 to hear their thoughts and concerns about parking. The following is a summary of the main topics of focus and concern at these meetings:

#### *Business Improvement District / October 9, 2014*

How do we get employees out of shopper parking spaces?  
 Enforcement is good, but we need more enforcement of time limits.  
 Need to crack down on double parking.  
 Parking problems are bad in Gussack Plaza and Grace Avenue lots.  
 Need 100 more spaces downtown.

#### *Chamber of Commerce / November 12, 2014*

Employees feeding meters.  
 Need to promote turnover of shopper parking spaces.  
 Not enough parking for merchants.  
 Need employee parking alternatives / awareness program.  
 Need more pick-up / drop-off spaces near Fedex / Bond Street.  
 Consider valet parking for shoppers.  
 Need better maintenance of Maple Drive Garage.  
 Cats in Plaza Centre Garage.  
 Need more cameras and patrols / Teenagers drinking in Maple Drive lot at night.  
 Consider “pay by cell phone” for parking.  
 Consider free parking for scooters / scooter parking areas.  
 Need parking garage at train station.

### **Discussion**

The parking conditions observed in critical shopper parking areas along Middle Neck Road and in the Grace Avenue and Gussack Plaza lots are generally unhealthy because some parking spaces intended for downtown shoppers or visitors are being monopolized by long term parking activity. This is not uncommon in central

business districts across the country however, the extent of this activity measured in Great Neck Plaza is somewhat higher than we would expect compared to similar business districts in the northeast.

This monopolization of the VGNP parking supply was the primary topic and complaint raised by both the Village BID and the Chamber of Commerce.

Mitigating the negative impact of “long term” parking activity that occurs in “short term” parking spaces is critical because the resulting loss of parking space turnover can cause a significant number of potential parkers to be turned away. Some members of the Chamber even suggested that this phenomenon may have contributed to the demise of a national chain such as Pinkberry in downtown VGNP.

To illustrate this concept consider the case of block side “D” on Attachment No. 1, the west side of Middle Neck Road between Cutter Mill and Grace (the block with Best Bagels). As indicated in Table 1 (below) *four parkers who parked illegally in excess of 2 hours on this block on 9/18/2014 may have displaced up to 22 legitimate parking customers: 7 who could have used the 5 minute button; 9 who could have parked between 5 and 30 minutes; 4 who could have parked between 31 and 60 minutes; 1 who could have parked for 61 to 90 minutes; and 1 who could have parked between 91 minutes and 2 hours.*

<b>Calculation of Parking Activity Lost Due to Unlawful Extension</b>	Space 1		Space 2		Space 3		Space 4		All 4 Spaces	
	Measured on 18 Sep 2014	Potential Parking Activity Lost	Measured on 18 Sep 2014	Potential Parking Activity Lost	Measured on 18 Sep 2014	Potential Parking Activity Lost	Measured on 18 Sep 2014	Potential Parking Activity Lost	Measured on 18 Sep 2014	Potential Parking Activity Lost
Used 5 minute button	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	7
Parked between 5 and 30 minutes	0	3	0	2	0	1	0	3	0	9
Parked between 31 and 60 minutes	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	4
Parked between 61 and 90 minutes	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Parked between 91 and 120 minutes	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Parked (Illegally) in excess of 2 hours	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	4	0
<b>TOTAL PARKING TRIPS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>

*Table 1 – Calculation of Potential Parking Activity Lost Due to Unlawful Extension*

**Recommendations**

The following parking program recommendations are based on our observations of parking conditions in downtown VGNP, our knowledge and experience gained from the development and implementation of parking programs in many similar downtown districts in New York and across the country, and input from Village stakeholders. The top two objectives of this parking program should be:

Objective 1: The reversal of unhealthy parking patterns where long term parking activity monopolizes key parking spaces intended for shoppers and visitors;

Objective 2: The development of a sustainable and reliable revenue stream to fund parking system upgrades.

Ironically, an increase in parking rates is commonly employed by municipalities to assist in achieving both of these objectives.

### Objective 1

Because the displacement of healthy / turnover parking activity by long term parking activity in the CBD is a key issue that affects the availability of downtown VGNP parking it is recommended that changes be implemented immediately that are designed to reverse these unhealthy patterns. The simplest and most effective parking management strategies to accomplish these goals are:

- a) Reduce time limits in strategic locations;
- b) Increase parking fees.

*Reduction of time limits* - When time limits are reduced it encourages parkers with longer term parking needs to seek and utilize longer term parking spaces such as 4 hour limit meters, 10 hour limit meters, or parking permit spaces. It also inconveniences meter feeders to make additional trips to feed the meter. This is why you will encounter many “Main Streets” in central business districts with predominantly “One Hour Limit” parking. Based on our study of Middle Neck Road it is estimated that on-street parking demand in downtown Great Neck Plaza is:

Less than 1 hour	72% of on-street parkers
Less than 90 minutes	84% of on-street parkers

Based on these patterns and our estimate that the majority of parkers staying longer than 90 minutes are long term (possibly downtown employee parkers) we recommend that the time limit for parking along Middle Neck Road, the Village’s main commercial corridor, be reduced from 120 minutes (2 hours) to 90 minutes (1.5 hours). Parkers needing longer parking durations may seek parking on other streets where the 2 hour limit will remain in effect or in off-street parking facilities with 2-hour, 4-hour, or 10-hour time limits. Note: This change would only affect the 92 parking spaces along Middle Neck Road. The remaining 343 on-street spaces in VGNP would remain 2-hour limit.

Based on our study of off-street parking areas it is estimated that parking demand in the Gussack Plaza lot is:

Less than 1 hour	67% of parkers
Less than 2 hours	75% of parkers

Based on these patterns and our estimate that most parkers staying longer than 3 hours are long term (possibly downtown employee parkers) we recommend that the time limit for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Gussack Plaza Lot be reduced to 2 hours, while the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the lot remains 4 hour limit parking. This ratio is in response to actual parking demand measured at the site.

*Increase parking fees* - The parking fee increase is recommended for two reasons. The first is to encourage downtown employees to purchase parking permits instead of using spaces intended for shoppers. An employee parking permit can be purchased for \$90 per quarter. This translates to \$30 per month or about \$1.50 per day for full time employees who work about 20 days per month. Today, a meter feeding downtown employee can spend most of a typical day parked in prime downtown parking spaces for \$1.25 per day<sup>1</sup>, a 17% discount from the permit parking cost.

The second reason to increase parking fees is discussed under Objective 2.

It is recommended that parking fees be increased to 50¢ per hour at the following locations: all on-street meters; the Gussack Plaza Lot; and the Grace Avenue Lot. This increase is designed to improve parking opportunities in these critical parking areas and to produce additional revenue that can be recycled back into the parking system for upgrades. The rate increase would also increase the daily parking expense of meter feeding employees from \$1.25 to \$2.50, a 67% premium above the permit parking rate.

## Objective 2

Parking garages serve an important function but place a significant and recurring burden on their owners' budgets. Parking garage owners need to perform ongoing maintenance and repairs on their parking structures to keep them in a state of good repair. This work includes; sealing decks, replacing caulk, painting, replacing lighting, replacing parking control equipment, replacing or repairing elevators, crack repairs, cleaning decks, replacing joints, etc. In addition, parking garages consume significantly more electricity than other parking facilities due to higher lighting requirements.

As a result, it is extremely rare to find a municipality with two parking garages that charges as little as 25¢ per hour to park. In fact, we have not encountered fees this low in a two parking garage town or village since the 1980's.

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<sup>1</sup> Purchase 3 hours of parking on the streets for 75¢ between 9am and 12pm by feeding the meter, take car to lunch between 12pm and 1pm, purchase 2 hours of parking on the streets for 50¢ from 1PM to 3PM, move car into one of the parking garages at 3pm to take advantage of the "free after 3" program. Total out of pocket = \$1.25.

Many Long Island towns and villages with active downtown districts such as VGNP have adopted a 50¢ per hour or higher parking fee structure over the past five years as indicated below:

Long Island, NY	Hourly Parking Fee		Rate Increase Past 5 Years?
	2009	2014	
Cedarhurst	50¢	50¢	
Lawrence	50¢	50¢	
Lynbrook	25¢	50¢	Yes
Mineola	50¢	\$1.00	Yes
New Hyde Park	25¢	50¢	Yes
Rockville Centre	50¢	75¢	Yes
Roslyn	50¢	\$1.00	Yes
Stewart Manor	25¢	50¢	Yes
Huntington	25¢	\$1.00	Yes
Patchogue	Free	\$1.00	Yes
Port Jefferson	50¢	50¢	

The expense burden of parking garage ownership coupled with the fact that 50¢ per hour and higher parking fees are common on Long Island leads us to conclude that an increase in hourly parking fees in VGNP from 25¢ to 50¢ per hour is justified and required to support system improvements and the parking management strategies described herein.

Ancillary Recommendations

A number of our recommended parking space management strategies are designed to move long term and employee parkers out of parking spaces intended for short term parkers, shoppers, and visitors. As a result we further recommend that changes be established to accommodate the anticipated shift of the long term parkers. These include: a) converting some under-utilized short term metered parking spaces in the parking garages to long term meters or employee permit spaces, b) allowing permit parking (overflow or designated) in the under-utilized back section of the Maple Drive lot.

In addition, the current parking format does not favor temporary employees or those who may work 1, 2 or 3 days per week and whose place of work is not proximate to the Plaza Centre garage where they can purchase a \$5 permit and use the 10 hour meters. The Village should consider extending this program to the

Maple Drive garage so temps and part-timers in the north and west sectors of the business district have access to 10-hour meters.

*Discussion –*

Based on our experience the combination of higher rates and reduced time limits as recommended will have a positive discernable effect on downtown parking conditions as spaces in the affected areas will open up more frequently and a greater number of short term parking trips are accommodated. This was recently accomplished in a parking program designed by Level G Associates for the Village of Patchogue where a 90 minute limit / 50¢ (day) / \$1.00 (night) per hour on-street parking fee was implemented to successfully shift downtown employees from the streets to the lots. One year after implementation of this program, this very successful downtown is as popular as ever, and spaces are opening up on Main Street for the first time in years.

Such a “recalibration” of the downtown parking supply is needed from time to time in response to changing surrounding land uses and parking patterns. It is recommended that additional measurements and recalibrations be considered in VGNP after the proposed changes have been in effect for at least 12 months.

**Summary of Recommendations**

The following strategies are recommended for immediate implementation:

1. Reduce the time limit of the 92 parking spaces on Middle Neck Road from 120 minutes to 90 minutes. The remaining 343 on-street spaces located throughout the Village would remain 2-hour limit.
2. Reduce the time limit of about 65 spaces in the Gussack Plaza Lot from 4 hours to 2 hours while allowing about 25 spaces in the lot to remain 4 hour limit.
3. Increase parking fees at all on-street meters; the Gussack Plaza Lot; and the Grace Avenue Lot from 25¢ per hour to 50¢ per hour.
4. Increase permit parking opportunities in the two garages and the Maple Drive lot to accommodate an anticipated shift of employee parkers from short term spaces.
5. Extend the \$5 permit / 10-hour limit Gussack garage meter program to the Maple Drive garage so part-time and temporary employees in the north and west sectors of the business district have access to 10-hour meters.

The following strategies are recommended for consideration in 2015:

- In response to actual measured demand, reduce the time limit of the southern ½ of the Grace Avenue Lot from 4 hours to 2 hours while allowing the other ½ to remain 4 hour limit.

- Pay-by cell phone. Allowing customers to pay for parking using their mobile phone is a growing trend and will cost the Village very little to implement.

Technology Upgrades. Research the cost-benefit of technology upgrades such as new meter equipment, LED lighting in lots and garages, and enforcement / permit issuing equipment and software.

### **Parking Research and Best Practice**

Parking practices have been the subject of study and debate for many years. In the 1960s and 1970s Yale University and the Eno Foundation conducted significant studies and research and published a series of handbooks on parking best practices. This research was updated and republished by Eno in their widely referenced 1990 reference book “Parking” by Weant and Levinson.

In 2010 Dr. Donald Shoup, the head of Urban Planning & Design at UCLA, published the groundbreaking book “The High Cost of Free Parking” where he researches and explains how low or no-cost on-street parking creates congestion, harms the local economy, and damages the environment as unnecessary cruising for cheap parking dumps tons of hydrocarbons and other toxic emissions into the local atmosphere every year.

And the debate continues today. In a recent article Dr. Edward Glaeser, a Professor of Economics at Harvard University writes “Just because parking is publically provided doesn’t mean it should be free, or only \$1.25 per hour. If a commodity is scarce... we need a way of allocating it. Drivers shouldn’t be bribed with underpriced on-street parking, we should be charged for the congestion we create. If drivers are unwilling to cover the cost of what the City gives up by maintaining valuable space as on-street parking, then the space should be used for something else”.

### **Responses to Concerns of Stakeholders and Residents**

1. *Raising parking rates will drive shoppers away to the malls or towns with free parking.*

There is no empirical evidence linking an increase in parking fees with a decrease in business activity. Page 9 of this report lists eight Long Island communities that have raised parking fees in the past 5 years and all these downtown districts are healthy or thriving. In fact, Rockville Centre, Mineola, Patchogue, and Huntington have all recently received awards and recognition for downtown innovation, walkability and economic development.

2. *Shorter parking time limits are a bad idea and won’t work.*

Shorter parking time limits are needed to discourage the number one complaint by downtown businesses and stakeholders.... the monopolizing of parking spaces intended for shoppers by long-term parkers. The time limit proposals set forth in this report are based on hard data collected in downtown GNP and we are recommending a 90 minute time limit along Middle Neck Road and no changes (2 hour time limit to remain) on all other streets – a mix of 1½ and 2 hour limit spaces. Most Long Island communities who have faced similar issues have already recalibrated their downtown on-street parking time limits as indicated below:

On-Street Business District Parking Time Limits\*

Port Jefferson	Mix of 30 minute & 60 minute limit
Manhasset	60 minute limit
Williston Park	60 minute limit
Albertson	60 minute limit
Rockville Centre	80 minute limit
Patchogue	90 minute limit
Mineola	Mix of 60 minute & 2 hour limit
Syosset	Mix of 60 minute & 2 hour limit
Port Washington	Mix of 60 minute & 2 hour limit
Great Neck Plaza (Proposed)	Mix of 90 minute & 2 hour limit
Roslyn	2 hour limit
Westbury	2 hour limit
Great Neck Plaza (Existing)	2 hour limit

*\* Does not include special pockets of 15 or 30 minute limit spaces near post offices or take-out establishments, or for part time loading.*

As indicated, Great Neck Plaza ranks among the longest permitted on-street time limits on Long Island and would remain among the longest if our recommendations are established. We are only recommending an incremental change which, we believe, will have a discernable benefit.

3. *Maybe we should try Valet Parking*

If properly implemented, a valet parking program can alleviate some parking headaches in a crowded CBD. The Town of Huntington implemented such a program for public parking in the Summer of 2014. We understand that the program was funded by the B.I.D. and deemed a success, but was not continued beyond the Fall of 2014. It is recommended that the VGNP contact the Huntington BID to learn of the pros and cons of their valet parking experience to gauge the cost-benefit and feasibility of a similar program in Great Neck Plaza.