

Mayor's Column

July 9, 2018

Village Administrator Jim Palmer and I recently attended a parking seminar sponsored by the Urban Land Institute. Given the parking needs/constraints/potential opportunities in our Village, we thought well worth our time and we weren't disappointed.

Overview

The United States has 260 million cars and currently 800 million spots so the inventory is not scarce, rather location. Not surprisingly, all the compiled data reaffirms that driverless cars are coming and ride sharing is gaining ground. With them come the anticipated problems of even more grid locked streets as cars are programmed to head home after drop off or continue on to a new destination. Cyber hacking is also definitely in the mix. All the experts thought that even with the burgeoning popularity of UBER and LYFT, combined with new technology, parking needs for the next 10 to 15 years will not change appreciably. Data confirms car sharing services are replacing taxis, rental cars and bus transportation, not car ownership and rail service. Americans still have a unique love affair with cars. We are in fact very slow to embrace technology, unlike our peers in Asia and Europe, that take our cars away from us in the form of automated or stackable parking. Many unique reasons account for this.

It starts with an abundance of land that our counterparts in Asia and Europe never had to personally park their vehicles. Psychologically we also don't like to give over a prized possession and we certainly cannot tolerate wait time as a vehicle is retrieved. (Almost 20 years ago, a fully automated state of the art parking garage was opened in Hoboken. Not long after its debut, cars fell from upper decks setting the industry back decades according to experts.)

So looking at a parking paradigm that is not going to change a great deal in the foreseeable future, the solution is to manage what we have in the most efficient way possible and/or build so that the structure can be retrofit if another use comes to light. This requires municipalities to first turn inward and look at local codes, 24/7 patterns, overnight parking, meter timing, fee structures, shuttles,

valets and traffic patterns. We are doing all of the above in the context of our recently launched Village Comprehensive Plan.

On the building front, the trend is for open air garages to be zoned for much higher first floors and narrower ramps so mixed use is an option.

Even meters must be looked at as a performance measurer – are they helping abutting businesses to move traffic/customers and much less as a revenue generator.

In a very interesting experiment, Summit, NJ just decided to forego any new parking lots/structures and has contracted with UBER at a cost of \$175,000 per year to ferry the overflow residents to the train station. It is too early to tell if it is a success.

The great news is that Bronxville is so in style – if we were ever out! – as a model TOD (Transit-Oriented Development). Data clearly validates that all age groups, with a particular emphasis on millennials, want to be in walking distance to public transportation, stores, schools, and medical services. The benefits are enormous both environmentally and socially. Dependence on the automobile is reduced as is gas consumption is reduced and roads are less congested decreasing the carbon footprint. A walkable community has healthier residents who interact more often with their neighbors on a direct, more satisfying level.

Ancillary to the ideal of an entirely safe walkable existence is a discussion of the need for charging stations, numerous drop off and pick-up areas for ride sharing and the use of bikes. (As an aside, the Greenbike program in Yonkers has left the Village with abandoned bikes in numerous unauthorized return locations.) No one in the suburbs has embraced the Citi-Bike concept of numerous “stalls” in front of their homes or businesses, so the solution remains vexing.

In an amusing/befuddling aside, Bronxville residents mirror their Westchester neighbors in that though so many have migrated from Brooklyn, Queens or Manhattan, where a parking space within two or three blocks of one’s destination is a find, if a spot is not available on the street where their dining or shopping is located in the suburbs, this is inadequate parking.

The take away is that as a community and a government we must be flexible, be it public-private partnerships to effectuate more space or using the same space multiple times in a 24-hour cycle.

The buzz word seems to be “context” parking – i.e. the relation of the space nearest to the desired use intended. Is it best for a Manhattan bound commuter, a reverse commuter, a weekend only traveler, a merchant who needs to drive to his place of business, a shopkeeper who desires speedy turnover in front of his store or a diner who desires a leisurely meal? All somehow must be balanced optimally with a little creative thinking.

The Board of Trustees and I are working on a variety of parking solutions, all at various stages of effectuation, reinforcing how important it is to take into consideration the current variables and future needs to make the most judicious and visionary decisions.