

Parking Myths Debunked

Recently, I have heard several well-meaning individuals repeat “urban myths” about the parking situation in Downtown Pensacola. While I know of no one that enjoys getting a parking citation, it is not possible to preserve turnover in the limited parking and loading spaces that line the downtown streets without consistent enforcement. Prior to the establishment of the Downtown Parking Management District, the average stay in a curbside parking space downtown ranged from just over three hours in some blocks to just over eight hours in others. A common refrain from business owners used to be “downtown doesn’t have enough parking”. The perception of no parking in the downtown has all but disappeared as multiple curbside spaces are now readily available and convenient at almost any time of the day for the folks that we all want to use them – the customers, clients, and visitors. The average length of time that a vehicle stays in any given curbside public parking space is now down to less than two hours. As a result, more people get to use these public assets more often.

With this success has come a second generation of parking myths that sound just as believable - but are equally untrue.

MYTH #1: Parking enforcement is too aggressive.

FALSE. Every block face in the Downtown Parking Management District (DPMD) gets a minimum of two passes by a parking enforcement officer each day. No block face gets more than three passes per day. The frequency of passes per block changes per day and per week. Less than two passes per block face would be tantamount to no enforcement at all because time checks would not be possible. The only other time that a parking enforcement officer should be on duty in a block already covered is when responding to a call for assistance from a downtown business owner or delivery vehicle driver that is seeking help with a parking violation that is negatively impacting their business. The parking enforcement officers are trained to treat every vehicle they encounter fairly and consistently – regardless of the identity, employer, or relatives of the driver. On a monthly basis, almost as many warning tickets (with no costs) are issued as are parking citations. Everyone who gets a ticket for overtime parking has previously gotten a warning ticket for the same offense.

MYTH # 2: Parking enforcement hurts downtown businesses

FALSE. Regulation of the commercial loading zone users is absolutely necessary to ensure that delivery vehicles can get supplies and inventory to downtown businesses without blocking the traffic lanes. When the delivery vehicles were prohibited from stopping in the traffic lanes and moved into curbside commercial loading zones, Palafox Place was able to return to two-way traffic. The results have been an increase in traffic (from before the street was converted to two-way traffic) by almost 2000 more vehicles per day. Such traffic increases only enhance visibility for and access to downtown businesses.

MYTH # 3: More parking citations are being written on Palafox.

FALSE. Since December 2008, every succeeding month has seen a decline in the number of parking citations issued for overtime parking along Palafox. More vehicles are using the time-restricted curbside parking spaces along Palafox Place each month while fewer and fewer of those vehicles are getting overtime parking citations. Both trends are what was desired and expected.

MYTH # 4: DIB makes money off of parking citations

FALSE. Any revenue generated from parking fines can only be spent for parking system operations, improvements, or enhancements. To date, revenues are just about matching expenses for such things as enhanced lighting, security, repairs, signage, maintenance, utilities, etc. The DPMD was intentionally structured to barely break even for the first three years of existence so that the necessary changes to create a predictable and consistent positive parking experience could be implemented incrementally. Funds generated from anywhere in the parking system must be segregated in separate accounts, not co-mingled with other DIB funds, and audited each year. The DIB does not and cannot divert funds from the parking enterprise to any of its other accounts except to make reimbursement for documented expenses incurred on behalf of the parking operations.

People are always free to believe what they want to believe. But sometimes, the facts just don't line-up with the perceptions espoused. With regards to downtown public parking, I believe that to be the case.

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