



June 9, 2021

Petition and Website Challenge Permit Parking Proposal

By Anne Levin

Concerns about goals and recommendations presented at a recent meeting of Princeton Council by the Permit Parking Task Force have been growing in different parts of town.

Last Friday, the website sensiblestreets.org was posted by residents of the Western Section, which is among the neighborhoods targeted by the task force for commercial parking spots. Across town in the neighborhood near Princeton High School, a petition urging the municipality to abandon the plan had 172 signatures as of Monday evening.

“Residents of the streets surrounding Princeton High School are concerned about the plan’s overnight parking, the commercial parking being pushed into our neighborhood, and how to manage [parking by] contractors and landscapers,” said Anita Garoniak, who lives near the high school. “And we’re also getting people from outside the neighborhood.”

The task force, which was formed in 2019, is made up of members of Princeton Council, residents, and representatives from local businesses. The plan aims to harmonize parking rules in different neighborhoods including the Tree Streets, Witherspoon-Jackson, the high school area, and most recently, the Western Section, making them more equitable while offering essential worker parking for employers in commercial areas.

Viewers who log on to sensiblestreets.org are taken on a virtual floor-by-floor ride through a nearly empty Spring Street Garage. The video is dated “Monday (non-holiday) 11 a.m.” The site labels the proposal “a solution looking for a problem,” saying there is a “perception of scarcity” which is not accurate.

[Sensiblestreets.org](https://sensiblestreets.org) aims to provide residents with easy access to the proposal, and to the 2017 parking study by the consultants

Nelson-Nygaard.

“If residents are not aware of the breadth and scope of the plan that would lease commercial parking spots to employers in front of their homes at a subsidized rate, we want to help them understand and make their own determinations as to whether this is justified,” said a Library Place resident who declined to be identified. “It all needs to be discussed. Our goal is to educate residents of all the

neighborhoods, not just the Western Section, about the proposal; describe the impacts of commercial parking spillover; and ask, what is the problem we are really solving?”

The petition opposing the plan says it will replace a permit system that has been in place for many years, and serves the [high school] neighborhood well. “It will create additional cost impacts and place time limitations for parking on the street for taxpayers who need to utilize parking in front of their homes,” it reads. “In effect, it creates parking issues and financial and logistical burdens for the homeowners where there currently are none.”

The petition also opposes surveillance by a roving vehicle that captures and processes license plates “and is managed by a for-profit vendor,” finding it “very troubling.”

Councilman David Cohen, who serves on the task force with Council President Leticia Fraga and Councilwoman Michelle Pirone Lambros, said the group is listening to concerns from the community and refining their proposal.

“I want to emphasize we are taking a break to gather more information to demonstrate the need, which was one of the strong comments we heard at the last Council meeting,” he said on Tuesday. “We need some time to gather information for the central business district, which is most relevant for the Western Section. We’re also cognizant of the need to have more outreach in that neighborhood. We brought them into the plan fairly late in the game, and realized there wasn’t as much of an opportunity as in other neighborhoods. “

Having said that, Cohen stressed that the task force remains committed to the plan geared to making parking more equitable. “In three out of the four neighborhoods where we asked if the level of employee parking [recommended] was unintrusive enough that they’d be willing to accept it, there was good buy-in,” he said.

Cohen said he doesn’t blame people for not going deep into the details of the plan. “It’s an incredibly complex issue,” he said. “One of the things people complain about is that this is such a complicated solution. But it’s actually a fairly simple solution to a very complicated issue. We’re trying to make it more equitable. In some neighborhoods it will be a bit better; in some a bit worse. But it’s going to be much simpler than it has been, and that’s part of

what we're trying to accomplish as well — a simplification and equalization of the way the program works for different neighborhoods.”

Mayor Mark Freda said the permit parking plan will not be on the agenda of the next Council meeting on June 14. “The task force is listening and hears concerns raised by numerous people throughout the community,” he said Tuesday. “They’re going to go back and work on it further before bringing it back.”

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