Parking with Purpose

From Parking Supply to Mobility Strategy

Downtown Burlington Parking Plan
Canada Parking Association Annual Conference 2026

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City of Burlington



Where Parking & Mobility Intersect
MONTRÉAL 2026 CPA ACS

The question everyone wanted answered

“Does downtown need more parking?”

It was a simple question — but the answer depended on whether we were looking at supply, availability, distribution, or perception.

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Compact, mixed-use, and changing



85 ha

study area

Growth

residential intensification, tourism, festivals, events, hospital access, and downtown employment all overlap in a small geography.

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Count the system people actually use



4,140

observable parking spaces

86%+

located off-street

45%

of inventoried spaces publicly owned

… but ownership ≠ public availability

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Access is dynamic

Regulation/Rate	*Weekday*	*%*	*Evening*	*%*	*Saturday*	*%*	*Sunday*	*%*
Public Access Free Parking	44	1%	1,325	37%	1,076	30%	1,276	36%
Publicly Owned, Pay Parking, $2.00/hour	1,147	32%	0	0%	300	8%	100	3%
Privately Owned, Public Pay Parking	293	8%	215	6%	330	9%	330	9%
Permit Only	321	9%	22	1%	22	1%	22	1%
Reserved (Customer/ Visitor/Employee/Tenant)	1,772	50%	1,900	53%	1,849	52%	1,849	52%
No Parking	0	0%	115	3%	0	0%	0	0%

The system is not static.

Spaces shift between public access, permit, customer, employee, loading, paid, unpaid and time-limited uses.

A downtown can have supply and still have an availability problem.

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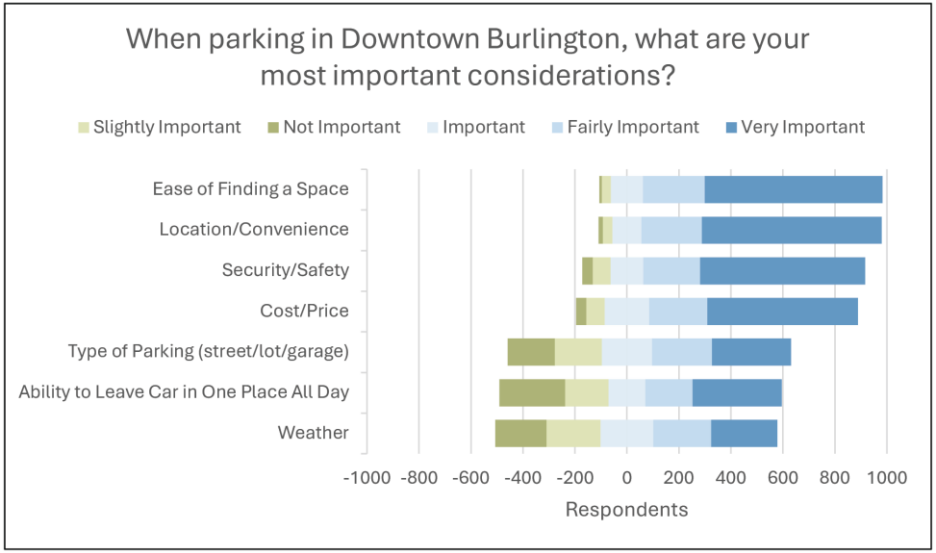
What people experienced was real

“I can’t find parking.”

Public and business feedback consistently pointed to weekend access challenges, special events, navigation, proximity, and the experience east of Brant Street.

Our job was not to dismiss perception. We needed to diagnose what was creating it.



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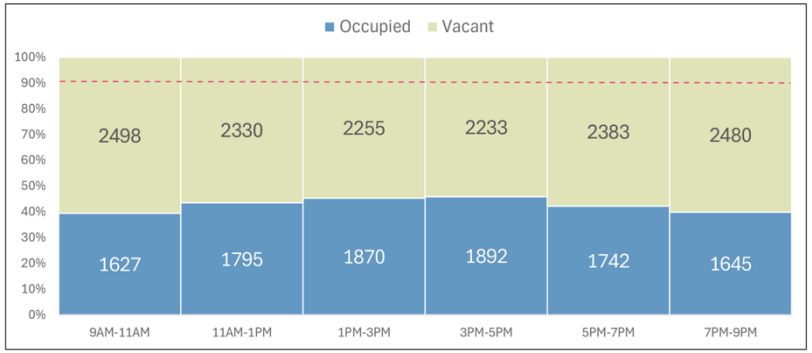
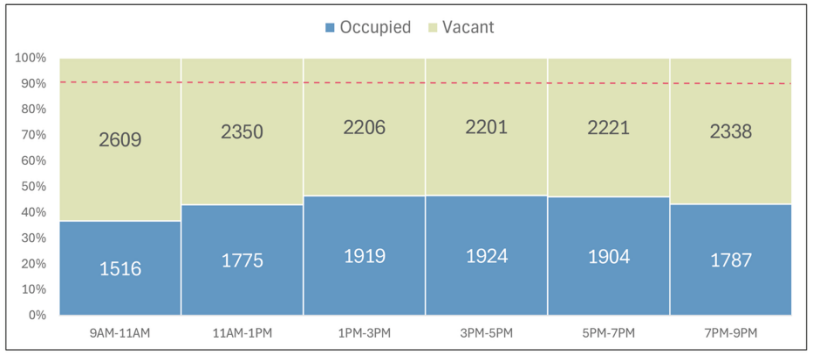
The system was far from full



Friday peak: 46% occupied



Saturday peak: < 50% occupied

Even during the busiest observed periods, the study area inventory had substantial vacant capacity.

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Geography changed the story



Localized pressure

Facilities east of Brant Street regularly exceeded functional capacity during peak periods.

>90%

Users perceive “no parking” even when other areas have significant supply.

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Geography changed the story



Friday Afternoon (3 – 5 PM)

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Geography changed the story



Friday Afternoon (5 – 7 PM)

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Geography changed the story



Friday Afternoon (7 – 9 PM)

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Geography changed the story



Saturday Afternoon (1 – 3 PM)

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Geography changed the story



Saturday Afternoon (3 – 5 PM)

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Geography changed the story



Saturday Afternoon (5 – 7 PM)

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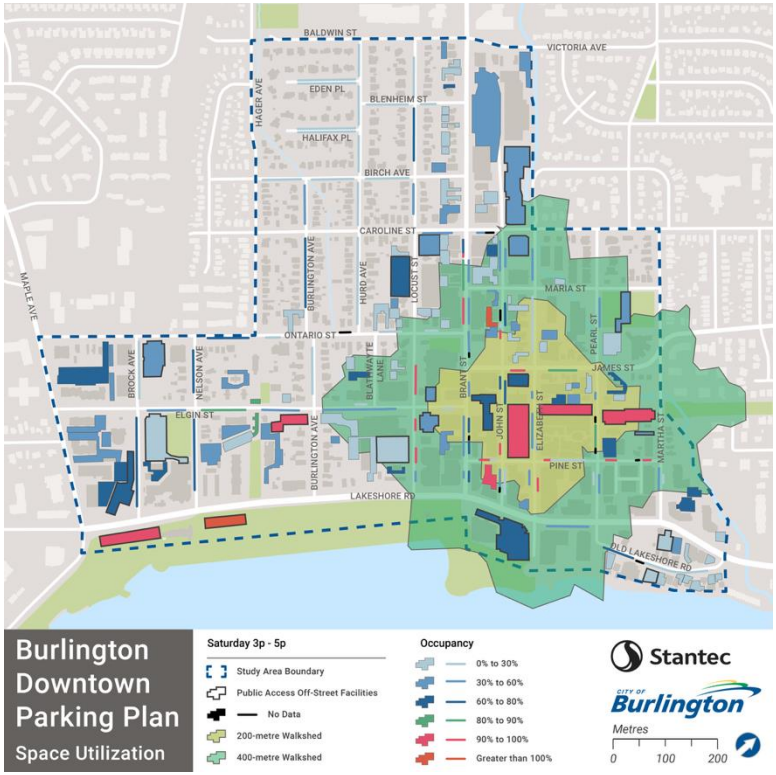
The diagnosis



A localized availability problem was being experienced as a system-wide supply problem

That distinction changed the solution

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Then we looked forward

4 Growth Scenarios



The model tested development already in the pipeline, pending applications, concept-level redevelopment, and an aggressive long-term scenario.

Question: will intensification make the current parking challenge become a true supply failure?

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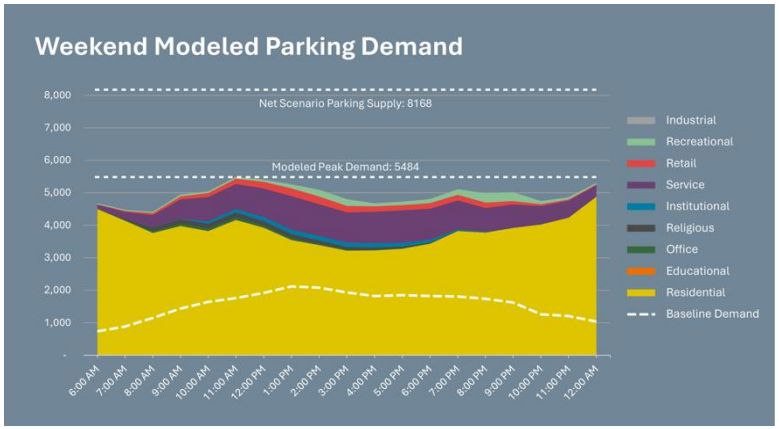
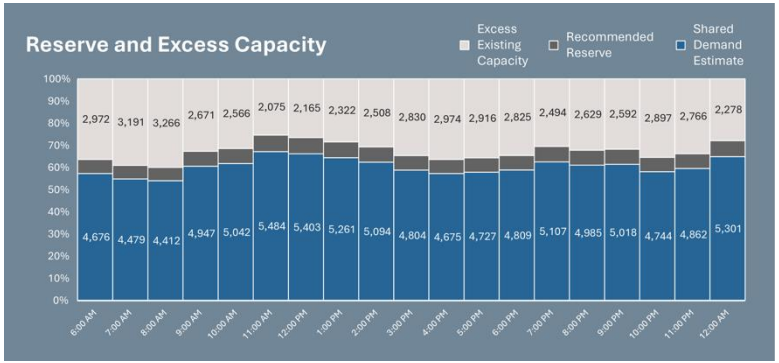
Growth did not trigger system-wide failure





Scenarios 1– 3

Expected to be accommodated within the existing parking system.

Scenario 4

Tightens conditions but still does not show system-wide failure or demand exceeding theoretical supply.

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The strategic pivot…

From “build more” → **to “manage better”**

Manage existing assets before committing reserve dollars to constructing new supply

Supply still matters. But supply expansion becomes the last step in a performance-based system - not the default starting point.

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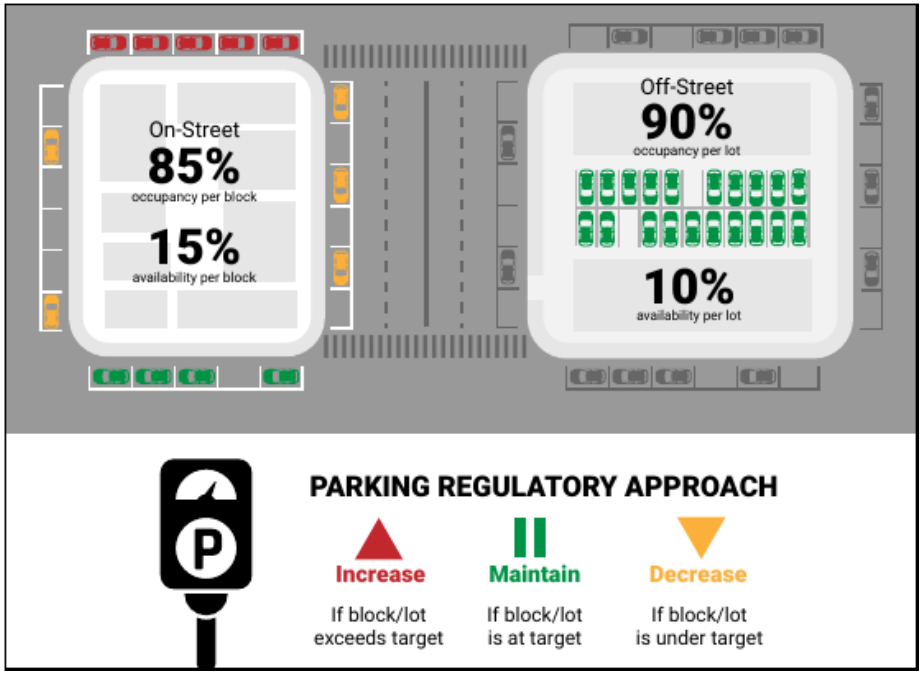
Make availability the performance measure



15%

on-street availability target

10%

off-street surface lot availability target

Availability tells us whether a customer can actually find a space, not just whether inventory exists.

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Pricing becomes a management tool



Tiered pricing

Price premium spaces to preserve availability and turnover.

Price lower-demand facilities to attract longer stays and distribute demand.

Not simply raise rates … instead, manage outcomes

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Make the available parking visible





Information changes behaviour

Advance information, dynamic wayfinding and better lot-level displays reduce cruising, frustration and perceived scarcity.

Don’t just create capacity. Help people find it.

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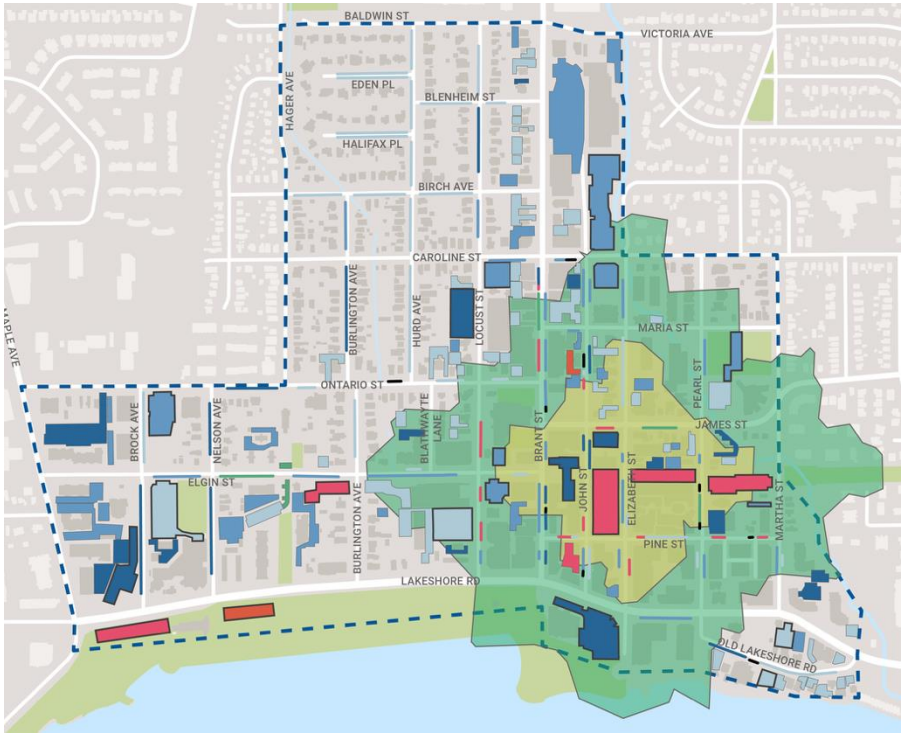
Design for a “park once” Downtown



400 m

about a five-minute walk

If walking conditions are comfortable and destinations feel connected, parking supply can serve multiple stops instead of single-purpose trips.

Parking strategy becomes public-realm strategy.

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Events need their own operating plan

Typical day ≠ event day

The plan recommends a special-event and waterfront demand-management program

Tools can include:

- event-specific pricing
- shuttle/valet partnerships
- advance visitor information
- directing demand to underused facilities.



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The recommendations work as a package

The Plan groups recommendations into four focus areas. Individually, many are modest. Together, they shift the system.

1 **System regulation & performance**

2 **Asset management and operations**

3 **Operational programs and policies**

4 **Funding and financials**

The package is incremental, adaptable and measurable.

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Implementation: “low hanging fruit” first

Short-term policy/program work → medium-term technology/system investments → longer-term capital planning.

Short Term

System Regulation & Performance ($)

- Adopt Performance Measures
- Formalize Public-Private Access Agreements
- Update Defined Parking Area Boundary

Medium Term

Asset Management and Operations ($$)

- Enhance Payment Systems
- Expand Wayfinding
- Special Event Pricing & Management
- Refine Parking Requirements in ZBL

Long Term

Capital Planning & Investment ($$$+)

- Future Parking Expansion
- Pursue TDM Reduction Opportunities

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Council Approval

March 2026:
Approval of the Plan and
Endorsement of the implementation approach

11.1 Strategic Parking Framework for Downtown Burlington (PWS-05-26)



Phased

Targeted

Monitored

... and still realistic about future expansion if performance data warrants it.

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Lessons for other municipalities

1. Do not confuse perceived shortage with system-wide shortage.
2. Measure availability by location, time and user group.
3. Use pricing, information and regulations to distribute demand.
4. Treat events as an operating condition, not an exception.
5. Monitor before making capital-intensive supply decisions.

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The parking question isn't "Do we have enough?"

… it's "Are we managing what we have well enough before we build more?"

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