

DRIVING BUSINESS ~ Parking as a Catalyst - A Downtown Neighborhood Story

Parking supply and management are certainly two key players in downtown development stories. Local government must carefully weigh the use of its investments in areas that need some work in redefining and repurposing its structures in such a way as to attract developers to do the heavy lifting for transformation. Such planning often leads to some inevitable public “head scratching” as to the need for such investment in things like parking garages in areas that are full of empty store fronts, empty side streets, and not much activity.

The West Church/Campbell Avenue corridor was just such a sector that was crying out for development investment. Pioneer redevelopments such as Jefferson Center, Shaftman Hall, and finally the new YMCA were fabulous success stories for this area. But the truth was that the area and its businesses still lacked projects that “connected the dots” between the populous central downtown and these award winners.

The next waves of investment came with the uptick in residential living demand. Less pricey buildings with good front door appeal were in abundance in this corridor. Early developers targeted units with private surface or garage type parking under their buildings. These units were soon transformed but the residential demand was rising; and, that was not the only driver of parking demand. A city commissioned study pointed to unmet employee and visitor parking demand driven by multiple local, state, and federal offices in the area.

City leaders needed to create a catalyst that would anchor the corridor for private investment and to address unmet public parking demand. The public however, saw little to cheer about in these decisions with a quick rush to judgment that called for parking investments in the core where the people and shops were located. Who would ever want to park way up there? What a waste of money! However, what most people didn't know was that the decision to build a parking facility was strategically planned, calculated, and executed based on multiple factors that would catalyze new development and to support the existing investment.



While exploring this anchoring strategy, City leaders were approached by a design build contractor eager to provide an offer to build a parking garage. Not only that; but, their proposal was made using a new (at that time) strategy called the PPEA design/build partnership.

PPEA is an acronym the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act. State government created the Act in 2002 to allow agencies, institutions, and localities to form partnerships with the private sector. Through these partnerships, the public and private sectors work together to complete major projects, like building new schools, jails, and other facilities to serve the public interest. With a PPEA process, the private sector can submit unsolicited proposals to any agency, institution or locality in the Commonwealth. It is up to the locality to determine whether there is a need for the project, whether private sector involvement will be a timely and cost-effective way to implement the project, and whether to reject the proposal or accept it for further review and consideration.

Ultimately, the City of Roanoke developed a Request for Proposals for a PPEA project to construct the Campbell Garage. Donley's was selected as the Design/Builder for this five level, 113,000 square foot precast concrete parking garage. The advantages of a PPEA approach were bountiful with little upfront work and cost for the city. The garage was constructed for \$7.9 million and opened 2008.

Using a design build strategy meant that many more disciplines were at the table to shape the project and to better ensure that the final product was suitable to the potential tenants in that area and other workers that would be able to easily access the garage upon its completion. Potential developers also got into the conversation which helped shape the final product. Campbell Garage was constructed using green design principles, on time, and under budget in 2008.

Once the parking emerged, numerous development projects sprang up. With all the pieces in place, economic growth continued an upward climb. Today, most apartment units in the area are at or near full occupancy. Many were pre-leased before construction was completed. The Fulton Motor Lofts, Lofts @ West Station, Campbell Lofts, Beamer's 25 Restaurant, Auction House apartments, as well as other businesses have opened since 2008. And, there's still more to come! The old Rainbow/Kroger bakery has been purchased with the intent to convert that vacant building into a new mixed-use development with potential for apartments and commercial spaces.

The garage did experience lean usages during its early years. Through a combination of parking management strategies, the garage today is close to capacity. Over time, people realized that the walk was not bothersome and having safe covered parking at a bargain price was a steal. Residential parking is the predominant use of the garage today along with public parking for employees and patrons needing to access the host of government offices and businesses in the area.

Planning for other catalyst projects will surely occur but each sector of the City has different goals and needs. Still, it is worth noting that the once unglamorous parking garage took center stage to reclaim an important part of our downtown by helping to create affordable housing and a customer base for more business development in the area.

For what started out as a bit of a risky venture with slow patronage, the Campbell Garage is approaching full capacity - but don't worry - there's still plenty of room to park! Heavy residential uses means that lots of spaces are freed up as tenants head off to work. Find your space there by calling PARK Roanoke at (540) 343-0585 or emailing the office at parking@roanokeva.gov