

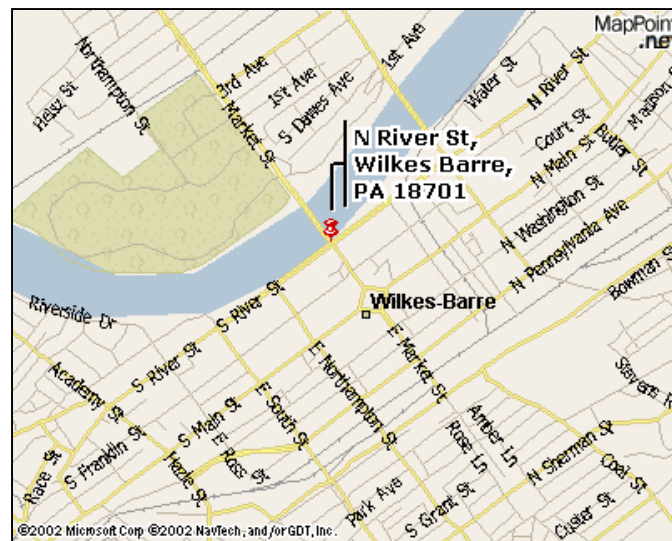
## VIII. Parking

To support the Strategic Market Development Plan of Downtown Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, CHANCE Management Advisors, Inc. (CMA) was asked to perform a limited assessment of Downtown parking conditions, and to interview selected business leaders regarding their parking-related concerns and issues, especially as they may affect future development opportunities.

On November 6, 2002, CMA staff conducted a one-pass survey of parking meter occupancy and violations in Downtown Wilkes-Barre between 11:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. The survey area consisted of selected metered streets within the area bounded by North Street to the north, Ross Street to the south, Pennsylvania Street to the east, and River Street to the west, as illustrated in Map VIII-A. Of approximately 100 block faces within this area, 27 were surveyed for meter occupancy and violations. There were 433 total parking spaces on the surveyed blocks, 92 percent of which (390) were regulated by parking meters. A listing of the streets surveyed and their associated parking activity is included in section VIII-F.

In addition, one and two-pass occupancy surveys were conducted of selected off-street parking locations in Downtown. The off-street surveys were performed between 1:30 p.m. through 7:30 p.m.

On the same date, CMA also conducted interviews of a number of downtown business leaders, at the offices of the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Business and Industry. A synopsis of the interviews is included in section VIII-C.



Map VIII-A: Downtown Wilkes-Barre

### A. On-Street Parking Conditions

Based on the results of the limited on-street survey and examination of other factors, it appears that motorists have minimal incentive to park legally. Enforcement appears to be sporadic, and current ticket fines and penalties, coupled with a reportedly weak ticket processing system, do not provide a sufficient deterrent to illegal parking. Meter violation rates, the violation capture rate, and the paid meter rate are severely substandard when compared with industry norms. Figures VIII-A and VIII-B illustrate these comparisons with parking industry norms. It should be noted, however, that a significant number of violations occurred in the vicinity of King's College and Wilkes University, which may also indicate a need to extend the meter time limit in these areas.

Figure VIII-A: Downtown Wilkes-Barre’s Meter Violation Rate and Capture Rate Differ Significantly from Norm

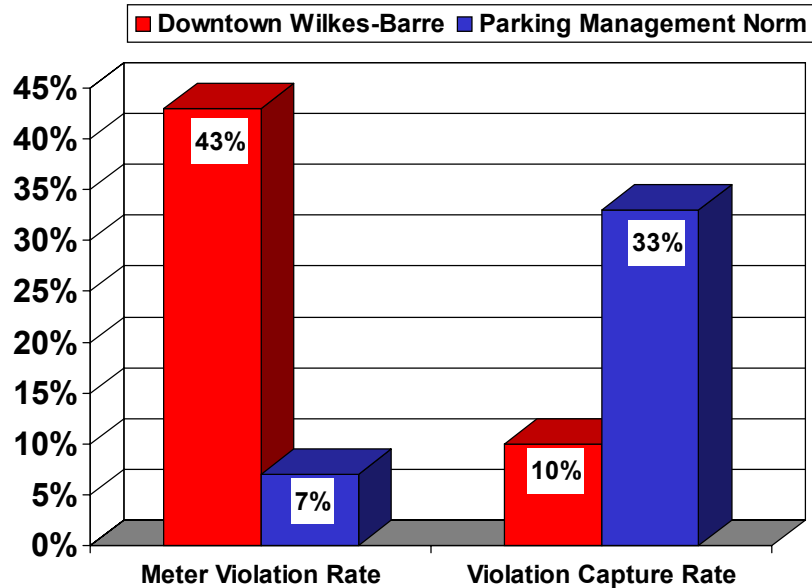
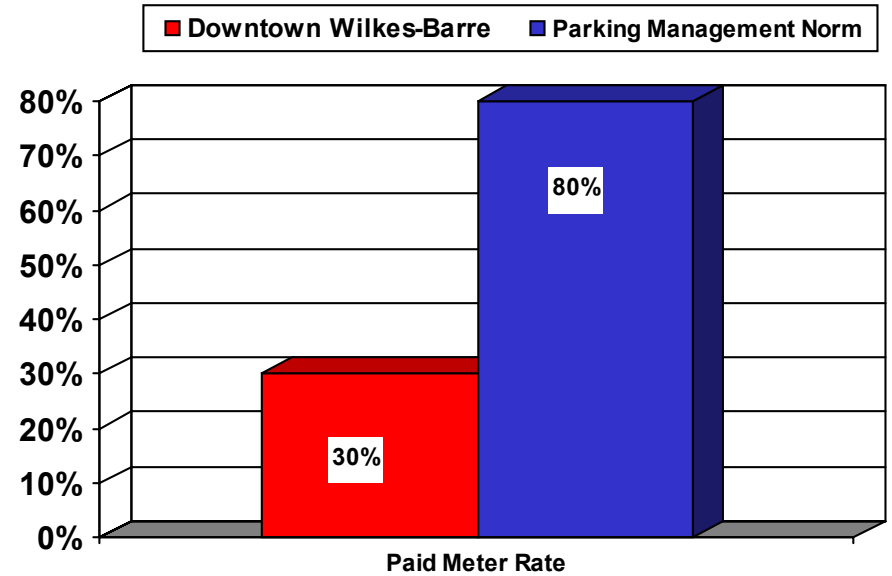
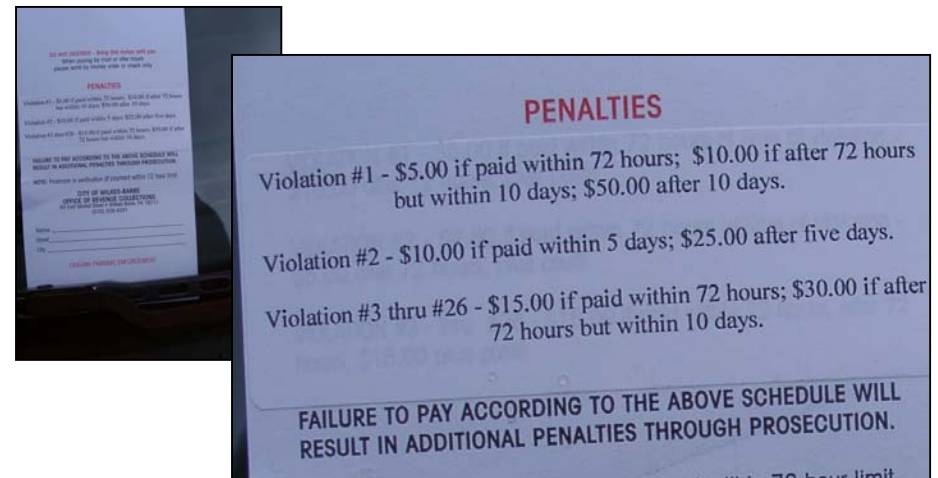


Figure VIII-B: The Paid Meter Rate Is Significantly Lower Violation Than Industry Norm



Based on the above indicators as well as discussions with stakeholders, it appears that the parking enforcement staff in Wilkes-Barre is understaffed. Two civilian enforcement officers are required to enforce approximately 700 parking meters (a ratio of one officer to 350 meters). This is below the more desired ratio for downtown parking enforcement programs of one officer to 200 – 250 meters.

Considered in their entirety, the survey results appear to indicate a disregard for parking violation sanctions. Additionally, the base fine of \$5, combined with an arguably complex and confusing penalty structure for nonpayment (as shown on the right), and anecdotal reports of serious delays in the processing of parking tickets, provide little disincentive to illegal parking. They also call into question the effectiveness of the overall ticket processing/collection and adjudication systems.



## B. Off-Street Parking Conditions

Surveys of both daytime and evening off-street parking use in several key downtown facilities appear to indicate available supply for present needs. The daytime occupancy of eight downtown parking facilities averaged 74%, with the Park and Lock Ramada (at the heart of Downtown) displaying the most use, with a 92% occupancy rate. This was observed on a one-pass, midafternoon survey, as shown in Figure VIII-C.

Figure VIII-C: Daytime/Afternoon Off-Street Occupancy Averaged 74%

Lot Number	Lot Name	Capacity	Time	Occupancy	Occupancy Rate
51	Park & Lock Central	410	1:18 PM	309	75%
50	Percy Brown Lot	120 [1]	1:22 PM	55	46%
33	Park & Lock Ramada	349	2:35 PM	322	92%
41	Park & Lock East	280	2:40 PM	249	89%
65	Genettis Hotel	500	2:54 PM	250	50%
23	Boscov's Garage	390	3:10 PM	318	82%
22	Citizens Bank Garage	400	3:26 PM	316	79%
40	Alltel & Martz	80	3:50 PM	52	65%
<b>TOTAL/AVERAGE</b>		<b>2,529</b>		<b>1,871</b>	<b>74%</b>
[1] Estimated capacity.					



The evening occupancy of five downtown parking facilities averaged an estimated 37%, with more than 1,000 parking spaces available at 8:00 p.m., as shown in Figure VIII-D. However, more than half of the available supply in the general vicinity of the proposed cinema complex at South Main Street and Northampton Street is located in the Park & Lock West, approximately one block south of this location.

Figure VIII-D: Evening Off-Street Occupancy

Lot Number	Lot Name	Capacity	Average Occupancy %	Spaces Available - 6:00 p.m.	Spaces Available - 8:00 p.m.
55	Park & Lock West	650 [1]	16%	464	625 [2]
47	Old Proposed Theater Site	93	9%	78	91
	YMCA	165	76%	28	51
<b>Subtotal/Average</b>		<b>908</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>767</b>
51	Park & Lock Central	410	65%	96 [3]	191
50	Percy Brown Lot	120 [1]	27%	59 [3]	117
<b>Grand Total/Average</b>		<b>1,438</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>725 [2]</b>	<b>1,075</b>
[1] Estimated capacity. [2] Estimated count. [3] Occupancy count not taken at 6:00 p.m., but estimated at 50% of 8:00 p.m. vacancy count.					



## **C. Feed-Back from Stakeholders**

On November 6, 2002, community stakeholders were interviewed by or participated in a discussion with CMA Principal Dr. Barbara J. Chance regarding parking issues in Wilkes-Barre.

### Summary

The consensus was that the business community has “been at war” with the Mayor for over five years. Primary issues are leadership, the lack of professional staff in critical City positions, the use of capital funds and overall finances of City government, and lack of responsiveness to business issues. Approximately 12,000 people work in Downtown, and the businesses are a vital source of support to Wilkes-Barre. Parking availability and the use of scarce parking financial resources are of great concern to the business community.

### Wilkes-Barre Parking Authority

A Parking Authority exists, but National Garages manages the parking garages under the Authority’s control. At times, the Authority has been persuaded to transfer assets (a garage) to the Redevelopment Authority without transferring the accompanying debt associated with the asset. At other times, facilities have been built that clearly did not make sense for community use, such as the Intermodal Garage with 800 spaces in a location that will probably not see that kind of parking demand for many years. Spaces sit empty in some facilities due to lack of marketing, lack of strategic planning about the use of resources, and no planning for services that could really support Downtown – both transient and all-day parking patrons.

The Parking Authority now has four garages and four parking lots. One garage was lost in 1999 when it was transferred to the Redevelopment Authority. A lot was lost when it was used for a development project the same year. There are also two City-owned lots that apparently are managed by no one.

National Garages has had a self-renewing contract (just a rollover year-to-year) since 1985. The contract has never been revised or renegotiated (National is now part of Central Parking.). The Parking Authority has a five-member board, several of whom have been on the board for over 25 years. Most net revenue of the Authority is transferred directly to the City, so no funds are built up for capital improvements, existing facilities or construction of new ones. Existing spaces are not used to maximum capacity, and spaces sit vacant when they could be filled by monthly permits.

### Parking Availability

Availability of parking has been a serious issue for businesses considering moving to Downtown. Landlords have leased parking and offered it free to incoming businesses as part of lease incentives to move Downtown. It is felt that the parking resources of the Authority, which are in effect

controlled by the Mayor, are not used to maximum advantage to support business location in Wilkes-Barre. Instances of inaction or stalling decisions were mentioned.

The location of parking is important to employees largely due to walking distances in the evening. Employees feel safe Downtown during the day, but less so once darkness falls. Similar to everywhere else, employees do not want to walk any distance to their vehicles.

Many businesses rent parking spaces from multiple owners in order to provide adequate parking for employees Downtown. In situations such as this, the employees pay to park, but fees are modest (e.g., \$26 per month). Parking for employees is tight, and any change in a business circumstance may make finding replacement employee parking difficult.

The YMCA serves approximately 1,500 individuals daily, and everyone driving tries to get into this lot because the walks from other lots are not attractive or considered safe. The 165 spaces usually serve at least 800 vehicles per day. The 45 monthly spaces in this lot are mandated by deed, and the others are used by various businesses. Many YMCA patrons are validated for parking if they are full members of the Y.

#### Parking Enforcement and Traffic/Transit Concerns

Parking enforcement is very ineffective in Wilkes-Barre. A parking ticket is \$5.00, but the issued tickets are simply tossed in a box, and collections are thus low as is the threat of getting a parking ticket for illegal parking. Parking Enforcement officers, who are civilians, report directly to the Mayor (regardless of what the organizational chart may indicate). The person in charge of parking meters reports to the Department of Public Works. Meters run until 5:00 p.m. There is really no public information about parking, the types and availability, or hours of operation.

Complaints related to traffic and parking primarily are as follows:

- There is not enough parking in Downtown.
- There is not enough short-term parking for customer's Downtown.
- Validations rates are not the same across all merchants.

There is also some desire to have streets operate as one-way pairs instead of two-way small streets.

LCTA transit ridership used to be high due to people coming to Downtown to shop. Now the belief is that the continuing ridership is mostly seniors, many of whom are not coming Downtown to shop. The transit hub is really Public Square, not the intermodal garage.

## Merchant/Commercial Parking Issues

Retailers have their difficulties also, as adequate parking for short-term shoppers is often not available. Retail use has suffered in Downtown Wilkes-Barre as it was “malled”, similar to many other towns its size. Adequate transient parking is a key to keeping the remaining retail stores Downtown, as is the increase of residential use and the creation of local markets for retail stores. Long-term retailers try to attract both students (due to the proximity of the colleges) and residents in order to have an adequate market. They believe that any garage should have transient parking on the ground level to attract shoppers and make it easier for them to find spaces for short-term use.

Parking validation proved in a recent survey to be a very important factor for consumers deciding to come Downtown. The merchants believe that validation is critical for them to be competitive with their more suburban counterparts.

Holidays bring parking difficulties Downtown, as shoppers increase and try to find available parking. Typically shoppers will double-park on-street rather than go into a garage, at least as long as they can get away with this behavior. Another location for double-parking is the Catholic Youth Center, which may have no parking of its own but generates considerable demand. Similar conditions are found around the Jewish Community Center, the YMCA, and the Courthouse. There is a belief that parking across from the YMCA (Mid-Town Village) should be oriented more toward shoppers.

## University Issues

A representative from King’s College noted that students could be larger consumers in Downtown if stores and other issues were more oriented toward them. With regard to parking, King’s assigns parking based upon seniority. Students pay \$0.75 per day. The student population is pretty constant, and they do not fill up all the parking lots assigned for them. Various development plans may eliminate some parking, and one structured facility is used only in part due to deterioration. There are, however, no plans to restore the facility. There are really no college-related parking problems that infringe on Downtown.

Wilkes University has established peripheral parking across the river, and offers this parking free with a shuttle ride back to campus. This is the fourth year they have run the shuttles, and they have been very well-received by the student body. Students ride these shuttles from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. The University also uses the shuttle to take students to the theatre on Friday evenings. Wilkes is seeing an increase in enrollment – it is approximately the same size as King’s at present with 1,800 full-time students. There are fewer spaces suitable for faculty and staff at Wilkes. Wilkes has rented 250 spaces in the Park and Lock South Garage as a way to find more reasonably proximate spaces. Both colleges have members of the campus community that park on public parking meters. Almost all the meters are two-hour and the colleges would prefer longer hours around their campuses. There is Residential Permit Parking by both institutions, and it has been in place for more than five years. Generally speaking, the most congested parking period at both institutions is 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The demand for parking is less in the afternoons, although any student may park in any lot after 4:00 p.m.

## **D. Parking Management Conclusions**

It is possible that daytime parking facility occupancies are depressed somewhat by the weak on-street enforcement. That is, motorists who would otherwise park off-street for longer periods may be parking on-street, given the apparently weak enforcement and ticket processing environment. This, in turn, may actually fuel perceptions of unavailable parking downtown, as street spaces remain occupied for extended durations. The latter condition is especially true in the King's College and Wilkes University areas about Downtown, where a significant portion of the meter violations were located. It is therefore recommended that weekday parking turnover studies (which were not conducted as part of this limited review) be taken during peak activity times to further measure both enforcement effectiveness and the propriety of the regulation time limit.

Likewise, while the limited review of evening off-street parking indicates sufficient capacity, final determinations should be made only after further occupancy studies are conducted, especially when events are being held in the Kirby Center.

It may be concluded with a strong degree of certainty, however, that the City's present approach to on-street parking management – in terms of staffing, organizational location (within the Mayor's Office) and ticket fine/penalty structure and processing difficulties – does not appear to be of the type necessary to support the demands associated with significant Downtown growth and development.

## **E. Parking Management Recommendations**

The following recommendations include improvements that may be affected in the near term, as well as those requiring a much longer implementation timeline.

- Conduct evening parking occupancy surveys when events are being held in the Kirby Center, to ascertain peak parking availability; also, conduct daytime turnover studies to validate the affects of insufficient enforcement on the potential use of off-street parking.
- Consider regulating longer meter durations in the vicinity of King's College and Wilkes University, and consider evening meter regulations where appropriate.
- Evaluate destination way-finding requirements with the goal of better communicating available parking locations.
- A more effective model for on-street parking management activities and infrastructure should be pursued, to include increased staffing, a more appropriate organizational location (for example, the WB Parking Authority), and enhanced ticket processing systems. In conjunction with the above, consider increasing the parking fine amount and simplifying the unpaid ticket penalty structure to discourage illegal parking.
- Decide a role for the Parking Authority in assisting businesses that would need parking in order to locate downtown.

## F. Downtown Wilkes-Barre Parking Occupancy Study

Legend: V-vacant; L-legal paid; T-ticketed violation; N-non-ticketed violation; UB-unpaid meter broken; UO-unpaid meter “other” condition (E.g. disabled placard, etc)

Time	Block/Street/Side (Meter)	# METER Spaces	Meter Spaces						Service Spaces				Safety Spaces				
			V	L	T	N	UB	UO	V	L	T	N	V	L	T	N	
11:40AM	S. River South/Ross	12		12													
11:50 AM	Franklin WS Ross/South	29	8	8		13							4				
12:00 PM	100 Franklin	38	3	15		19			1				7				1
12:10 PM	Franklin opposite Boscov's	15	0	4	0	8			3				17	1			2
12:20 PM	Unit N. Franklin Market WS	6	1	1	1	3				1	1		13				1
12:20 PM	Same above- no meters, 15 min parking	4	3	1						4	5		4				3
12:30 PM	107 Franklin WS - mostly permit parking	6	1			5											
12:43 PM	183 N. Main WS North/Jackson	28		16		12							1				
12:46 PM	N. Main Jackson/Union	19	1	5		13							1				
12:47 PM	N. Main Union/Market	17	1	10	1	4			1				6				
12:53 PM	Pub Square N. Main/Market	2	2							5			2				
12:55 PM	Pub Square W. Market/S. Main	0										7					
1:02 PM	WS S. Main Northampton/South	18	1	4	1	12							7				
1:06 PM	South Main/Washington	18	3	1	4	10							3				2
1:10 PM	ES S. Main Ross/South	16	6	8		2							7				



Time	Block/Street/Side (Meter)	# METER Spaces	Meter Spaces						Service Spaces				Safety Spaces			
			V	L	T	N	UB	UO	V	L	T	N	V	L	T	N
1:12 PM	ES S. Main South/Northampton	33	16	5		11		1					7			
1:15 PM	S. Main Northampton/Market	0											4			
2:15 PM	Public Sq. S. Main/E. Market	0														
2:17 PM	NE Public Square	0														
2:20 PM	ES Main PSq/Union - timed 15min.	18		6	2	10							4			
2:21 AM	Main Union/Jackson ES	13	5	3		5							1			
2:22 PM	Main Jackson/North ES	10	4	3	3				1				3			
2:50 PM	E. Side Penn Northampton/E. Market	18	17			1										
3:11 PM	Washington E. Market/Northampton	32	15	6	1	9	1						5			1
3:32 PM	S. side Union Franklin/Main	13	6	1	2	4							6			1
3:39 PM	SS Union Main/Washington	6	3	1	2								6			1
3:42 PM	Washington SS Union/E. Market	19	11	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>