



City of Toccoa

2024 Downtown Parking Study

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Methodology	6
a. Parking Capacity	
b. Parking Usage	
c. Survey of Business Owners	
Results and Analysis.....	11
a. Parking Capacity	
b. Parking Usage	
c. Survey of Business Owners	
Recommendations.....	20
Conclusion.....	24
Appendix.....	25

Executive Summary

Between January and May 2024, the City of Toccoa conducted data collection and analysis in order to answer a series of questions.

- Is downtown’s parking infrastructure sufficient?
- How does our town’s parking availability compare with similar cities?
- What days or times of day have the most parking strain?
- What areas of downtown have the most parking strain?
- Regardless of current condition, what improvements can be made?

A combination of research and data collection methods were used to find the answers to these questions as accurately as possible.

In particular, data on downtown parking was collected for Toccoa and ten peer cities. Using the definition of downtown outlined in this study, downtown Toccoa features 548 total parking spaces, of which 29 are marked for handicapped visitors. This ranks sixth out of the eleven total cities examined. When this metric is adjusted to include the size of the downtown studied, Toccoa rises to fourth out of eleven. And if it is adjusted by the number of buildings downtown, Toccoa rises to third out of eleven.

Six of the largest and/or most heavily-trafficked areas of downtown Toccoa were studied in order to determine parking occupancy. To do so, a comprehensive parking windshield survey was completed by Planning Department staff over five months, consisting of two hundred individual parking counts.

This revealed quite different rates of use across these areas, ranging from the 30% average occupancy rate of the West Foreacre Lot to the 68% average occupancy rate for Central Doyle Street. Moreover, the busiest time of day was found to be the lunch hour between noon and 1:00 p.m. Across these six areas during this time, the average occupancy rate was 64.8%.

As a result of this analysis and a survey conducted of downtown business owners, this study has concluded that downtown Toccoa does not currently have a need for new parking supply, but could benefit from a select number of targeted changes to ensure that the existing parking is accessible, visible, and best utilized.

Introduction

“Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order...This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance – not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bowing off en masse, but to an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole.”

- Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961)*

In the winter of 2023, the City of Toccoa began to consider conducting a downtown parking assessment and study. After years of diligent work and investment by both the private and public sectors, downtown Toccoa was quickly returning to an economic hub. In 2022, Toccoa was named one of eight semi-finalists nationally for the Great American Main Street Award, and the next year saw even more growth.

Eleven new businesses opened downtown in 2023: a coffee roastery (Living Room Roasters), art gallery (Crozier Collective Gallery), health and fitness center (Currahee Movement Collective), CrossFit gym (Currahee CrossFit), flooring business (Toccoa Flooring), video game and shoe store (GameSwitch), organic soaps and scrubs store (White Tulip Naturals), nail salon (Polished by Daph), venue (Phyllis Venue), and a taproom and restaurant (R&R Terminal). In addition, three existing businesses expanded, for a net growth of 25 jobs. In addition, 6 apartment units were opened downtown.

Moreover, 272 downtown public or private events were held in 2023, drawing 63,722 visitors. Additionally, the Historic Ritz Theatre hosted over 18,000 attendees across 147 shows, concerts, and performances – a 143% growth from 2021.

This economic growth is both correlated with and profits from the population growth of Toccoa. Increased residents and visitors have led to traffic increases. And downtown Toccoa’s economic vitality is not slowing. Nine new businesses either have opened or will open in 2024, the majority of which are food and beverage-related. Eleven new downtown apartment units will be opened in 2024. After the saga of downtown Toccoa over the past half-century or so, with many ups and many downs, it is a truly exciting time for the downtown area to see this level of growth and economic strength.

The most significant recent downtown change is Toccoa's newest park – the Tugalo Street Greenspace. This 1.2-acre park replaces an outdated and underused parking lot, originally constructed when a row of commercial buildings were demolished as part of an urban renewal project in the 1970s. Fulfilling several objectives of Toccoa's 2021 Comprehensive Plan, this greenspace fulfills the need for a public recreational and gathering space downtown, and will feature hardwood trees, a brick plaza, benches, and eventually public art displays, flanked by three redesigned parking bays.¹

This positive and healthy downtown growth – in housing, small businesses, and a park – brings a need for re-examination of old policies. Like a teenager outgrowing his shoes, even healthy growth can require new action.

Due to this overall increase in downtown businesses and traffic, the City projected that there may be parking strain as well. In coordination with the Downtown Development Authority, the City of Toccoa undertook this parking study between January and May 2024.

The purpose of this study is to measure the current availability of downtown parking, ascertain if there are areas or times of strain, and develop several actionable proposals if improvement can be made. Data was collected in three sections:

1. Parking Capacity
2. Parking Usage
3. Survey of Business Owners

Our goal is for downtown Toccoa to cement its place as the economic anchor and crown jewel of the region. A key part of this is finding the right balance between vehicle accessibility and the pedestrian experience, in order to facilitate both commerce and walkability, and to make the downtown “live, work, and play” experience come alive.

¹ Toccoa Comprehensive Plan: <https://www.cityoftoccoa.com/planning/page/comprehensive-plan-2021>

Methodology

As mentioned, this study is broken down into three components. The first (Parking Capacity) is a quantitative analysis that calculates the current parking capacity of a specified downtown area and then compares that with peer cities. The second (Parking Usage) is comprised of 200 individual counts of parking availability in six downtown areas of high usage, a mixture of streets and lots. Finally, the third component (Survey of Downtown Business Owners) is a qualitative survey with thirty respondents from downtown business proprietors.

Part 1: Parking Capacity

The section of downtown Toccoa was chosen deliberately, and can be seen in Figure 1. There are several ways of measuring a city's downtown. Even in Toccoa alone, downtown can be measured by the B-III zoning district (Central Business District), the Historic District overlay, or the Entertainment District. For the purposes of comparison with peer cities, however, several guidelines had to be established.

The ten peer cities (shown in Figure 2) were selected in part because they had an identifiable, historic downtown similar to Toccoa. This presence of a historic downtown is critical for purposes of this study, as such downtowns can sometimes have parking complications due to their physical layout. The American customer has grown used to driving up to a store surrounded by an island of parking, all of which is dedicated solely to that store. This is a modern development pattern.

In contrast, historic downtowns have a different, older pattern. Built before reliance on the automobile, these historic downtowns rely on street parking, shared parking, and communally owned or municipal-owned parking lots. Parking thus turns from a private good to a public good. Furthermore, historic downtowns are predicated on walking. This creates downtown's uniqueness in the modern day and age - tourists and locals alike value strolling down Main Street, while few enjoy strolling down a busy commercial corridor. But by blurring the lines of demarcation, downtowns often have a tension between ease of walking and ease of parking.

For these reasons, selected peer cities all had historic downtowns. The boundaries of these downtowns were primarily determined by adjoined buildings, which rely on the shared parking spaces discussed above. The fringes of every downtown begin to have businesses with their own parking lots, including banks, churches, and automobile repair shops. These were generally excluded. In general, adjacent public lots on the outskirts were also included for the sake of fairness, even if they did not fit in as neatly as do the three major public lots of Toccoa (on East Foreacre Street, West Foreacre Street, and Tugalo Street).

For unstriped lots that are clearly used for parking, the number of spaces was estimated as best as possible using standard parking lot measurements of 9x18'. Street parking spaces were never counted unless painted or marked, with the exception being cobblestoned roads where parking was evident but unmarked. The vast majority of these parking spaces across these cities were publicly-owned and maintained.

To conduct the parking counts for these peer cities, both the county's tax assessor aerial imagery (QPublic.net) and Google Street View were used to ensure a reasonable degree of accuracy. Each downtown parking space at these cities was manually counted by Planning Department staff. Handicapped parking spaces were identified by signage and striping, and to account for sampling error of handicapped spots in these peer cities, an adjusted figure of 25% higher is presented as well for analysis.

Other factors used to select peer cities were: city population, county population, median household income, size of the central business district, and the binary variables of county seat and Main Street City status. All data was taken from the U.S. Census Bureau. Ten of these cities were selectively chosen, eight within Georgia and two from South Carolina. As Figure 3 shows, the median factors of these peer cities are very similar to that of Toccoa.

In order to be both fair and remain germane beyond the current transitory time, and because this section is an examination of parking capacity and not usage, the incoming parking spaces in the Tugalo Street Greenspace are included in the data in Part 1. Their absence during the time of counting (Part 2) skews those numbers slightly upward. A future update, planned for 2025, will re-examine the parking capacity once the Tugalo Street lots are opened and in regular use.

Figure 1



Figure 2

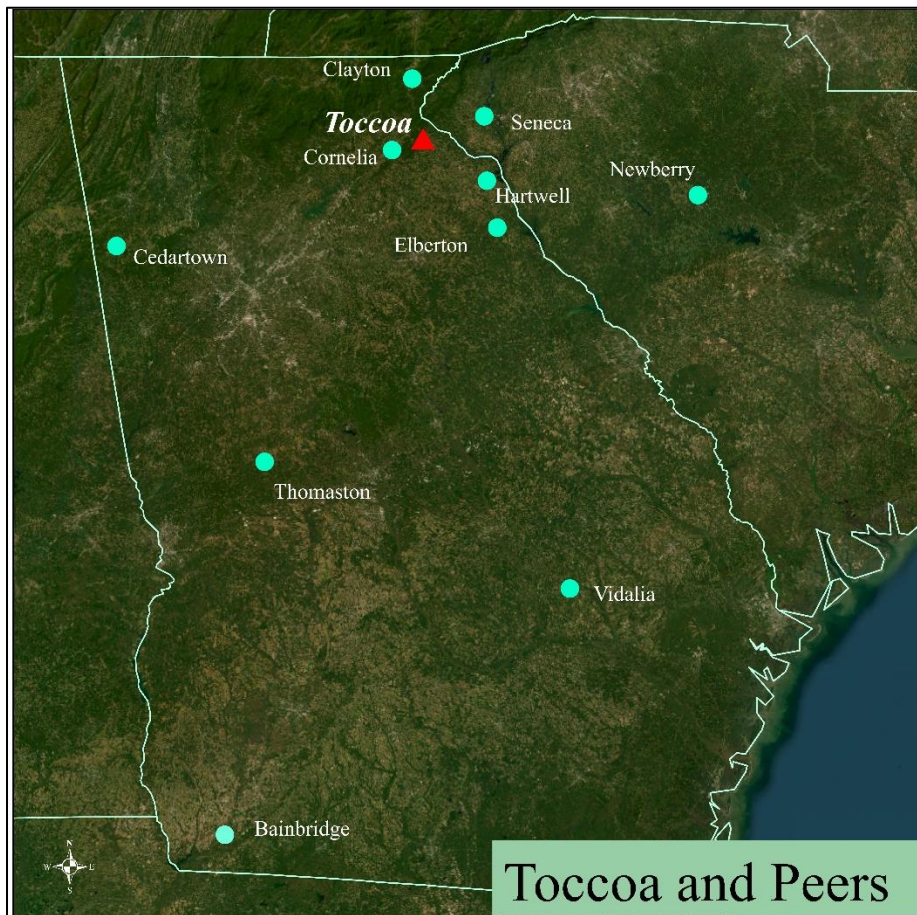


Figure 3
Comparison of Toccoa and Peer Cities

Category	Toccoa	Median of Peer Cities
Population	9,146	9,419
County Population	27,328	28,815
Median Household Income	\$49,860	\$46,543
County Seat	Y	Y
Main Street City	Y	Y
Size of downtown (sq. miles)	0.03	0.034

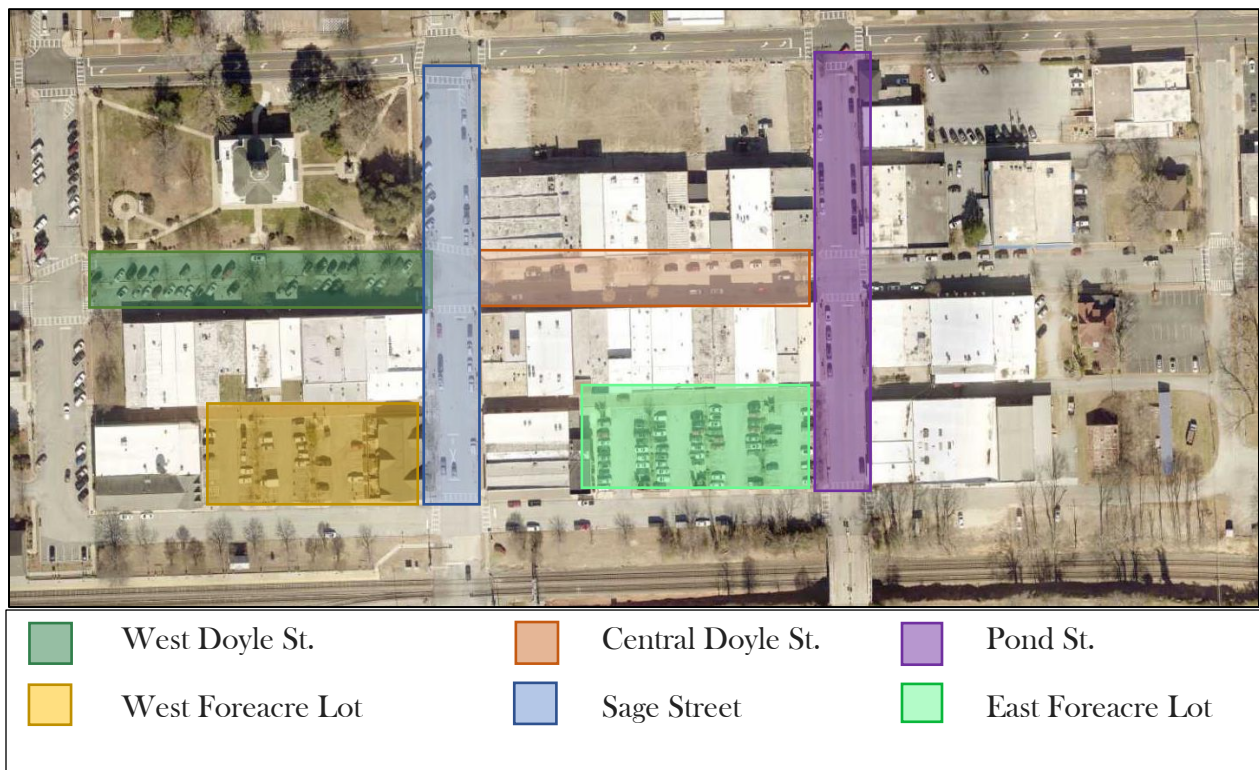
Part 2: Parking Usage

For the most labor-intensive part of the study, six heavily used parking zones were selected (four street sections and two lots) to examine the usage, or saturation, at different days and times of day. This enables analysis of two key questions. Firstly, does downtown Toccoa have enough parking? Secondly, what days or times of day have the most parking strain?

To calculate this, 200 counts were taken from the sections seen in Figure 4. For each count, a staff member pre-selected one or more sections and conducted a windshield count of the number of parking spaces occupied at that exact time. The day and time of each count was also measured to ensure a complete distribution (see Figures A2 and A3 in the Appendix). These counts occurred consistently from January 2024 to May 2024, and many occurred during downtown events, such as voting and early voting days, shows at the Ritz Theatre, and venue rentals.

Importantly, the entire Tugalo Street Greenspace lot was under construction the entire time these counts were underway. When completed in June 2024, this new greenspace will add 37 new parking spots to the downtown arsenal, including 4 handicapped spaces. These new spaces will particularly clear up spaces on Sage Street and Pond Street, as many downtown workers and apartment dwellers particularly have shifted over to parking on those streets in the interim.

Figure 4
Surveyed Parking Zones



Part 3: Survey of Business Owners

Finally, a survey was sent to downtown business owners and organizational leaders using the Cognito Forms platform. Thirty valid responses were received. Responses were limited to one per business, with the first submitted response noted as the correct one. Questions asked were primarily targeted towards the existence and scope of the parking situation, as well as helping to develop and test ideas for solutions. This enabled receipt of qualitative data and the first-hand perspective of those who work downtown every day.

Results and Analysis

Part 1: Parking Capacity

It is critical not to view a city myopically, but compare it with peers or neighbors for the sake of comparison and contrast. To do so, ten peer cities were chosen based on the variables listed in the Methodology section, demonstrated geographically in Figure 2. For a full comparison of these variables, please reference Figure A1 in the Appendix. Toccoa hovers near the average in nearly all of the variables (most notably population) with the exception of MHI, as it ranks as the most prosperous city out of the eleven studied.

Figure 5

Downtown Parking Counts						
Rank	City	Total	Street	Lot	Handicapped	Adj. Handicapped*
1	Seneca	811	358	429	24	26
2	Cedartown	693	145	530	18	20
3	Vidalia	681	219	445	17	19
4	Thomaston	653	218	414	21	23
5	Newberry	575	179	377	19	21
6	Toccoa	548	258	259	29	29
7	Clayton	501	149	328	24	26
8	Bainbridge	482	169	291	22	24
9	Hartwell	395	301	66	28	31
10	Elberton	374	174	180	20	22
11	Cornelia	240	166	61	13	14
*increased by 10% to reflect the potential of having missed street-marked only spots						

This portion of the study yielded the results seen in Figure 5, fleshed out further in Figures 7 and 8. As the data shows, Toccoa ranks exactly at the midpoint for the total number of parking spaces. This is Toccoa's positional rank for population compared to these other cities as well (Figure A1, Appendix). Interestingly, Toccoa has more downtown street parking than all but two of these other cities (Seneca and Cornelia), largely thanks to the fifty-one parking spaces on West Doyle, which act as a hybrid between street and lot parking.

In addition, handicapped-marked spaces were particularly noted. These are spaces reserved for the handicapped population and are indicated by blue parking curbs, handicapped-marked signs, painted symbols on the asphalt, or (commonly) all of the above. Toccoa ranks first out of these eleven cities in the number of downtown handicapped parking spaces, at twenty-nine in total. ADA

requirements call for 2% of parking spaces in lots between 501-1000 in size to be designated as accessible parking spaces; viewed comprehensively, then, downtown Toccoa has nearly three times this required amount.²

However, handicapped spaces can sometimes be inadequately marked. In order to capture those spaces that were missed on the remote count at these other cities, the Adjusted Handicapped column adjusts the total count upwards by 10% (with the exception of Toccoa) to provide a more liberal estimate. Figure 6 visually shows this comparison, using the adjusted figure for the peer cities. As with total parking availability, it is highly possible that downtown Toccoa may have enough handicapped spaces but all in the wrong place. On its face, though, downtown Toccoa is already amply provided with dedicated spaces for handicapped visitors.

Figure 6

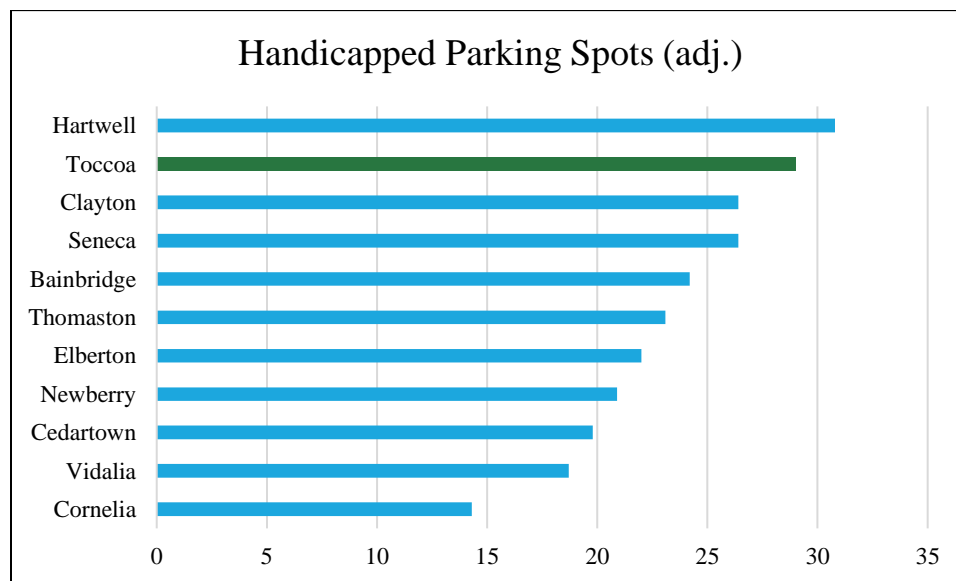


Figure 5 is helpful to know that, in terms of total parking availability, Toccoa is in line with the average for similarly-populated Southern cities. It is not unique in having a particular abundance or an unusual deficit of parking spaces. However, due to the differences in the physical geography of each studied downtown, more analysis is needed.

² U.S. Department of Justice, ADA: <https://www.ada.gov/topics/parking/>

Figure 7

Parking Relative to Downtown Size				
Rank	City	Total parking	Size of downtown	Parking spaces per 1/100 sq. mile
1	Seneca	811	0.037	219
2	Thomaston	653	0.032	204
3	Cedartown	693	0.036	193
4	Toccoa	548	0.03	183
5	Clayton	501	0.028	179
6	Bainbridge	482	0.031	155
7	Vidalia	681	0.044	155
8	Cornelia	240	0.016	150
9	Newberry	575	0.041	140
10	Elberton	374	0.03	125
11	Hartwell	395	0.038	104

Although Toccoa ranks well when it comes to the total parking spaces in each downtown, it is worth noting that, although a similarly-sized downtown was one of the parameters used to select the peer cities, there are slight variations. When this factor is weighed via a simple ratio, Toccoa's ranking jumps up to fourth-best out of the eleven cities. With 183 parking spaces per 1/100th of a square mile, Toccoa can be said to have a relatively high park space density.

Figure 8

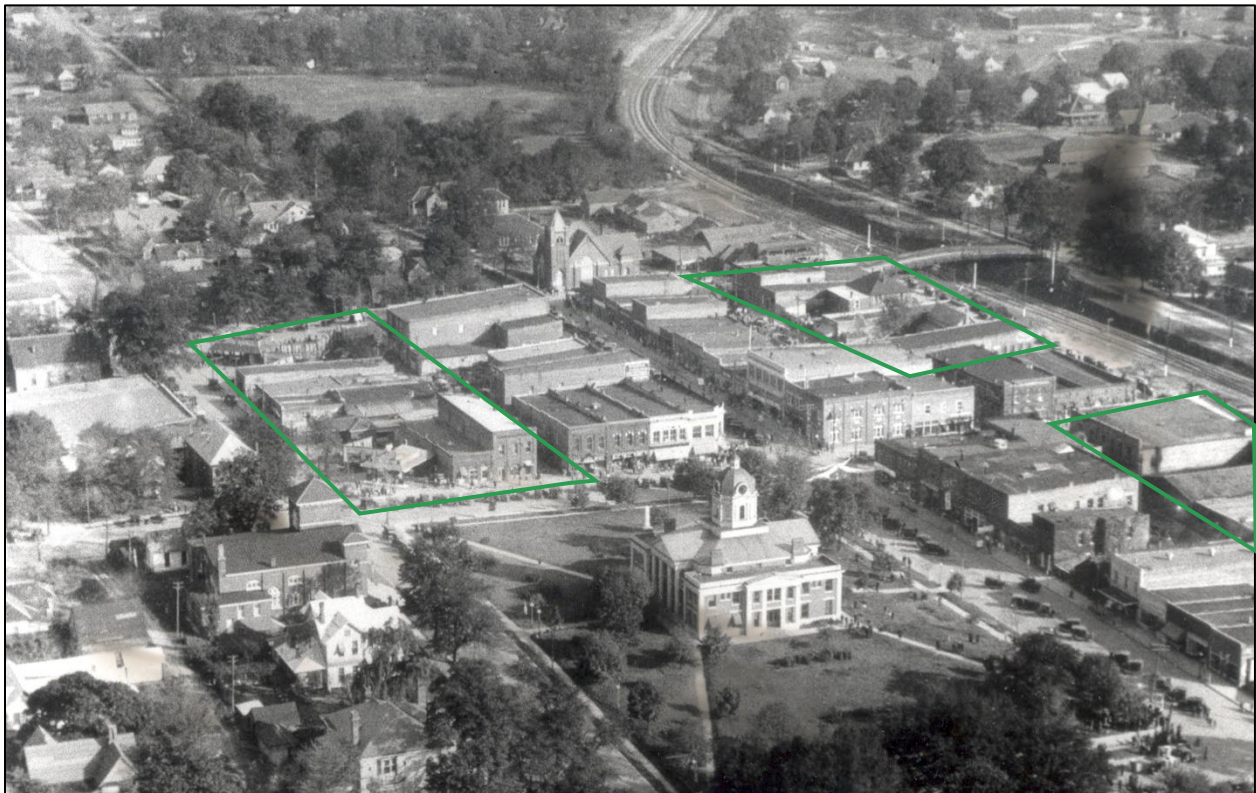
Parking Relative to Number of Buildings				
Rank	City	Total parking	No. of buildings	Parking spaces/bldg.
1	Seneca	811	75	10.81
2	Cedartown	693	72	9.63
3	Toccoa	548	61	8.98
4	Thomaston	653	75	8.71
5	Clayton	501	62	8.08
6	Cornelia	240	36	6.67
7	Vidalia	681	107	6.36
8	Elberton	374	62	6.03
9	Newberry	575	103	5.58
10	Bainbridge	482	87	5.54
11	Hartwell	395	95	4.16

Finally, Figure 8 weighs the total parking spaces by the number of buildings in the downtown area. Because some buildings can host multiple businesses and others may be entirely vacant, individual buildings were used in the analysis instead of individual businesses. This statistic can be seen as a stand-in for individual businesses, providing an estimate of how many parking spots can be

considered as available for each shop, office, or dwelling. In this measurement, Toccoa moves up further to third out of eleven, with a very high rate of parking spaces compared to similar cities.

An understanding of Toccoa's history can reveal why the downtown has an abundance of parking spaces relative to the size and number of businesses. Figure 9, from the mid-1920s, shows what the commercial core of downtown Toccoa used to look like. The areas outlined in green boxes were once packed with adjoining, zero-lot-line buildings like the rest of downtown. In the late 1960s, however, these twenty-two buildings were demolished as part of a federally-funded urban renewal project. Since that time, with the exception of a small row of townhouses on Sage Street and the nascent Tugalo Street Greenspace, these areas have been converted to parking lots. This fact alone accounts for downtown Toccoa's disproportionately high levels of parking spaces per building and per square mile.

Figure 9
1926 Aerial Photograph of Downtown Toccoa



Part 2: Parking Analysis

It is helpful to start with the big picture – does Toccoa have significantly more parking or less parking than other cities its size? But even more important for purposes of this study is the granular data. Does downtown Toccoa have a problem with parking? If not the entire downtown, how about particular sections? And if so, where, what times, and what days does this problem manifest?

Answering those questions called for hard data in the form of parking counts. As a reminder from the Methodology section, Planning Department staff went out two hundred individual times to conduct a windshield count, at all times of the normal business day and across the week (see Figures A2 and A3 in the Appendix). What does the data show?

Figure 10
Average Parking Usage



Figure 10 visually shows the average of the parking usage downtown, calculated by finding the “mean of means” of each hourly bracket for each specified parking zone. In other words, if Mrs. Smith wanted to park on Central Doyle Street at a randomly selected hour between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on a randomly selected day of the week, 68% of the spots would already be taken. This would leave Mrs. Smith 6 spots to choose from.

Across the board, then, downtown Toccoa has ample parking. Across these six lots and streets – the busiest in downtown – five out of the six average right at or less than 50% usage. A closer look at the statistics sheds more light.

Figure 11

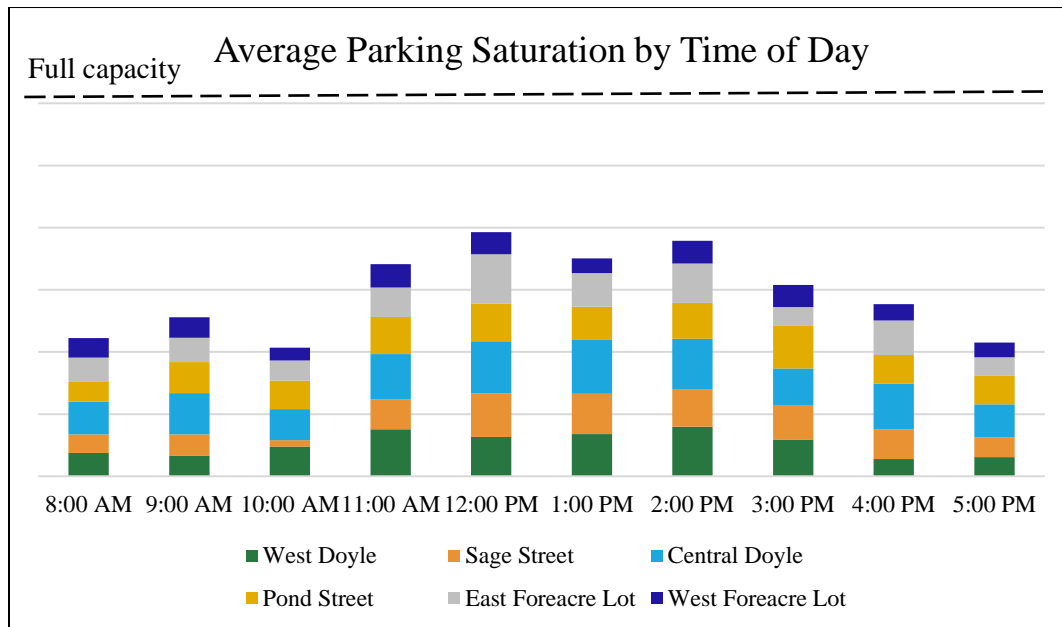


Figure 11 aggregates the average parking saturation, or total parking spaces occupied, for all six areas measured against the total capacity and broken down by time of day. It shows a recognizable distribution: lowest usage in the early morning, gradually ramping up until the lunch hours and early afternoon, and then gradually diminishing until the evening.

At the busiest time of day, the 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. lunch hour, these six areas on average are 64.8% full. That equates to 89.4 available parking spaces across these streets or lots. One study (albeit in a larger city) recommends 85% as the target occupancy rate; by this metric, downtown Toccoa has incredibly abundant parking.³

For a full comparison of the parking situation by area by hour, reference Figures A4 - A9 in the Appendix. Notably, Figure A4 shows the consistently high usage of the twenty parking spots on Central Doyle Street, in between Pond and Sage Street. During the lunch hours between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. daily, these twenty spots hover at or above 80% occupancy - roughly 20 percentage points about the downtown average for this time period. On the inverse is the West Foreacre Lot, which never rises above 40% occupancy and is consistently 10-20 percentage points less than the downtown average.

Out of the 200 individual samples taken, there was only one time when a particular street or parking lot was completely full. This singular occurrence was on Central Doyle Street, the most highly used and also smallest street or lot surveyed, on Saturday afternoon. In other words, during

³ <http://shoup.bol.ucla.edu/CruisingForParkingAccess.pdf>

the average day, there is a 99.5% chance that a random street or lot chosen downtown out of the six surveyed will have at least one parking space available.

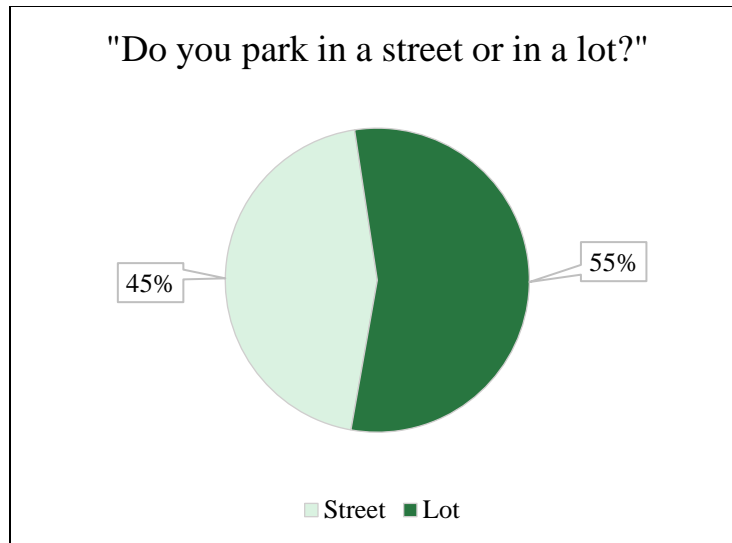
Thus, the downtown parking counts resulted in two primary conclusions:

1. **Downtown Toccoa has sufficient or more than sufficient parking.** This builds upon and confirms the findings of Section 1, which concluded that downtown Toccoa has an above-average amount of parking spaces for its size and number of buildings.
2. **Certain sections of downtown Toccoa are more heavily used for parking than others.** Figures A4 - A9 (Appendix) demonstrate this graphically.

Part 3: Survey of Business Owners

Thirty downtown business owners responded to the parking survey, which consisted of nine questions designed to capture their personal parking experiences, those of their staff and customers, and their thoughts about various improvements that could be made. Several data points from this survey are worth exploring.

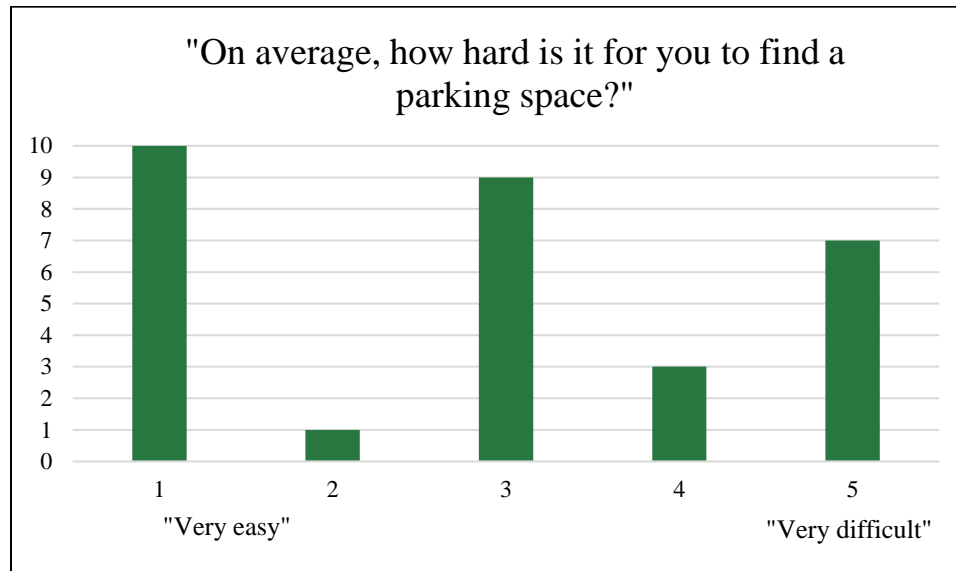
Figure 12



One of the first questions of the survey asked where the downtown business owner themselves parked. The results were near-evenly split, with 45% responding that they typically parked in the street, while 55% parked in a lot. Since street parking is the easiest access for downtown customers, the elderly and/or handicapped, and tourists, this immediately stands as an area where easy improvement could be made simply by more business owners parking in lots.

Another question asked for the number of customer complaints regarding the parking situation per week. The median response for this answer was one complaint per week.

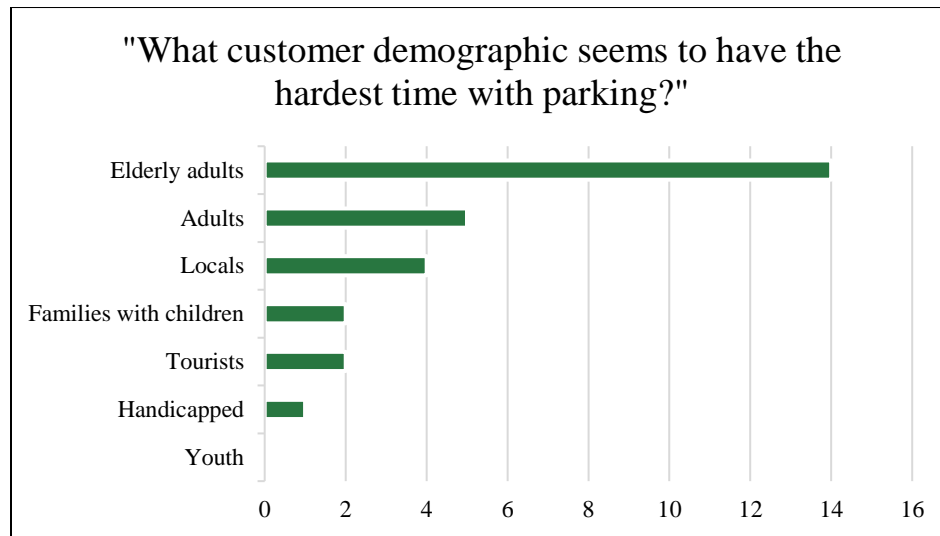
Figure 13



Next, the question expressed in Figure 13 captures the ease or difficulty with which downtown business owners themselves are able to park. Interestingly, the results are bifurcated. The mean of the responses of 2.87. 67% of respondents rated it as a three or lower, indicating that it was neutral, easy, or very easy for them to find a parking space. Seven business owners, however, did respond that it was very difficult. All but one of these seven businesses is located on the north side of Doyle Street, however, and are thus the most impacted by the current construction going on at the Tugalo Street Greenspace.

In the free-form response section, many of these seven indicated that their current issues were only caused by the ongoing construction. It can reasonably be expected, then, that these difficulties for these business owners will dissipate upon completion of the construction.

Figure 14



While Figure 13 reveals a split in the difficulty of parking – for some, it is accessible, while for others, more challenging – the question posed in Figure 14 seeks to uncover the source of this disparity. It reveals an unsurprising answer. The demographic that struggles most with the current downtown parking infrastructure are elderly adults. Even if not visibly handicapped, elderly adults are much more likely to have ambulatory disability that could make walking farther a challenge.⁴ And while many older adults can rely on a friend or family member to drop them off close to their destination, some do not have this ability. Street parking, particularly those coveted twenty spaces on Central Doyle, is the key to limiting the need to walk for the elderly population.

Of particular note is that tourists in Toccoa, on the whole, do not often complain about parking. Out of the thirty respondents, only two said that tourists had the hardest time with parking (Figure 14). As Section 1 showed, the excellent comparative parking supply of Toccoa compared to peer cities – not to mention the larger cities of the Atlanta metropolitan area – accounts for this.

When tourists from Atlanta, Greenville, Anderson, or beyond are used to paying for parking in garages a long way from their destination, or to circling the block over and over again trying to find a spot, the 32% average parking availability rate and universally free public parking of Toccoa likely feels like a dream come true.

“...tourists historically don’t complain about parking; in fact, they note how easy it was to park here compared to places like Helen or Blue Ridge.”

- survey response
from downtown
business owner

⁴ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20.8% of the population 65 years and older have ambulatory difficulty, compared to 4.4% of the population 18-64 years of age. Data from: <https://data.census.gov/table?q=disability>

Recommendations

The results of this study are optimistic about the current and future economic state of downtown Toccoa. With relatively abundant parking, Toccoa matches up favorably with peers to allow ease of access for visitors and locals alike. And yet, Toccoa's streets bustle with cars and pedestrians alike on weekdays and weekends, a sure sign of a thriving downtown economy. As one of nineteen Georgia Exceptional Main Streets (the top tier for a downtown district), Toccoa's historic, vibrant downtown is poised to continue its lofty status and resurgence.

Because no major issues were uncovered, drastic measures are not necessary. These include expensive and oft-controversial proposals such as converting to one-way streets, tearing down buildings to put in parking lots, or financing a parking garage at roughly \$70 per square foot⁵. There may be a time and place for that in the future, but as of now, that is not needed.

From the findings uncovered in this study come the following two primary areas for improvement:

- 1. Making better use of certain parking areas (namely, the two Foreacre lots).**
- 2. Dealing with the high usage rate of Central Doyle Street, particularly around lunchtime, which may particularly impact the elderly.**

⁵ Data from <https://www.clarisdesignbuild.com/2024-update-commercial-construction-cost-per-square-foot-in-the-us/>.

Figure 15
Recommendations

No.	Proposal	Details	Cost	Funding	Implementation Timeframe
1	Encourage lot parking for regulars	Encourage business owners and apartment dwellers to park in lots, instead of streets.	\$0	N/A	Immediate
2	Festival parking	For the largest events of the year, offer shuttle rides from outer parking lots for the handicapped or elderly.	Minimal	Existing budget	Immediate
3	Better signage	Install signs on the downtown public lots that indicate they are free, public parking.	\$1,000- \$2,000	Existing budget	1 month
4	2 hr. parking	See below sub-section	\$1,000- \$5,000	Existing budget	1-2 months
5	Better bicycle infrastructure	Install bicycle racks at the Tugalo Street Greenspace and in the passageway; shared-use path connecting downtown to HFP. This will expand the ability to visit downtown without driving, thus freeing parking spaces.	\$500- approx. \$500,00 0	City budget; grant funds	6 months to 1 year
6	Highlight nearby, underutilized parking	Maintain, improve, and potentially put signage on underutilized downtown parking (i.e. Railroad Street& Foreacre Street).	TBD	Existing budget	6 months to 1 year
7	Make the trip from downtown lots more attractive	Improve the breezeways between the Greenspace and Doyle and W. Foreacre Lot and Doyle; improve the walk from the E. Foreacre Lot to Sage.	TBD	City budget; grant funds	1 year

The seven actionable items seen in Figure 15 should help to improve the current downtown experience in several ways. First, by emphasizing signage, it will improve communication with locals and tourists alike.. Increasing pedestrian friendliness and bicycle accessibility will also help ease traffic concerns, as visitors can use alternative means of visiting downtown and walking will further become a joy and adventure. This focus can lead into further pedestrian/cyclist improvements down the road, whether through small improvements or grant-funded projects. Finally, there are numerous quick, targeted interventions that can ease pinch points at a minimal cost. These sorts of incremental solutions should be prioritized.

Two Hour Parking

One of the primary policy changes recommended is the implementation of two-hour parking limits. There are multiple options that could be pursued, each with their advantages and drawbacks.

1. **Central Doyle Street:** The original recommendation of the Planning Department was for the implementation of two-hour parking *only* on the portion of Doyle Street between Pond and Sage Streets. This was chosen based on the parking study results, particularly Figure 10 and Figure A4, which show this portion to have by far the most usage of any area downtown.
 - a. **Pros:** Cheaper implementation; less of a shock to the system; less maintenance and enforcement costs; more of a targeted action.
 - b. **Cons:** May not create as much change as desired; would not address any street parking concerns of businesses outside of the Central Doyle Street area.
2. **Central Doyle, Pond, Sage, and a portion of E. Doyle Street:** The second option (recommended by the Downtown Development Authority) extends the two-hour parking zones to include Sage Street (from the railroad to Tugalo Street), Pond Street (from the railroad to Tugalo Street), and the right-hand portion of E. Doyle Street (in front of Troup's and Family Eye Care) until it intersects with Hill Street.
3. **All Downtown Streets:** Another option (recommended by the Review & Advisory Committee) is to extend the two-hour parking limit to all downtown streets. The map recommended by these commissions for two-hour parking can be seen below in Figure 16.
 - a. **Pros:** Ensures that all street parking for downtown businesses is reserved for customers; necessitates more consistent enforcement vigilance, which could also help with downtown vagrancy, litter, street violations, etc.
 - b. **Cons:** Higher costs for enforcement, monitoring, and signage; potentially representing an overkill approach to a concentrated problem.

Figure 16
Option 3 - Two-Hour Parking Limit Zones



Any new signage will need to match the historic, refined infrastructure in place in downtown Toccoa. Figure 17 illustrates one type of affordable design that could be purchased. Doing so will ensure that the additions blend in and enhance the historic downtown, instead of detracting from it. Regardless of the chosen scope, enforcing these limits only from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday - Friday is the advised time frame.

Figure 17
Potential Sign Idea



Conclusion

Every day, rain or shine, downtown Toccoa bustles with the activity of visitors, residents, business owners and employees, and customers. It has never been more evident that downtown Toccoa is the heart of Stephens County. With new housing, small business activity, city events, and public projects comes a change in traffic usage. And in cities across the county, that sort of change can be difficult.

Through quantitative and qualitative data collection, it is evident that downtown Toccoa does not suffer from a major lack of parking. Across the board, Toccoa ranks very well when compared to peer cities for both regular, proportional, and accessible parking spaces. Furthermore, even during the busiest times of the week, there consistently are available parking spaces around downtown.

However, good urban planning takes the incremental approach.⁶ A healthy city “should look for the improvement of society...in relatively minute particulars.”⁷ Continuous, steady improvement – exemplified by the Japanese philosophy of “kaizen” – leads to less risk-taking, better stewardship of public funds, and policy effectiveness.⁸

Thankfully, Toccoa’s current parking infrastructure will enable it to continue as a beacon of hospitality and a small business engine for years to come. Come downtown at any time of day, and you will find a parking spot within just short walk of your destination – no endlessly circling the block, no paid parking spots, no half-mile treks. And through the successful implementation of a few targeted policy and infrastructure changes, a healthy downtown can be made even better.

⁶ “A core characteristic of growing complex, adaptive systems is the incremental nature of the growth,” in “Incremental Growth.” Charles Marohn, *Strong Towns*, 2019.

⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, 1948.

⁸ “Kaizen: Understanding the Japanese Business Philosophy”, *Investopedia*, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/k/kaizen.asp>

Appendix

Figure A1

Peer City Candidates								
City	State	County	Population	County Pop.	MHI*	County Seat	Main Street City	Size of CBD (sq. miles)
Bainbridge	GA	Decatur	14,234	29,367	\$ 42,093	Y	Y	0.031
Newberry	SC	Newberry	10,726	39,951	\$ 47,565	Y	Y	0.041
Vidalia	GA	Toombs	10,668	27,030	\$ 47,124	N	Y	0.044
Cedartown	GA	Polk	10,278	43,709	\$ 30,655	Y	Y	0.036
Thomaston	GA	Upson	9,858	28,263	\$ 30,298	Y	Y	0.032
Toccoa	GA	Stephens	9,146	27,328	\$ 49,860	Y	Y	0.03
Seneca	SC	Oconee	8,979	80,160	\$ 48,108	N	N	0.037
Cornelia	GA	Habersham	5,004	47,475	\$ 46,211	N	Y	0.016
Elberton	GA	Elbert	4,789	19,637	\$ 34,657	Y	Y	0.03
Hartwell	GA	Hart	4,469	26,110	\$ 46,875	Y	Y	0.038
Clayton	GA	Rabun	2,157	17,267	\$ 46,875	Y	Y	0.028

*Data from U.S. Census/ACS 5-Yr. Estimates

Figure A2

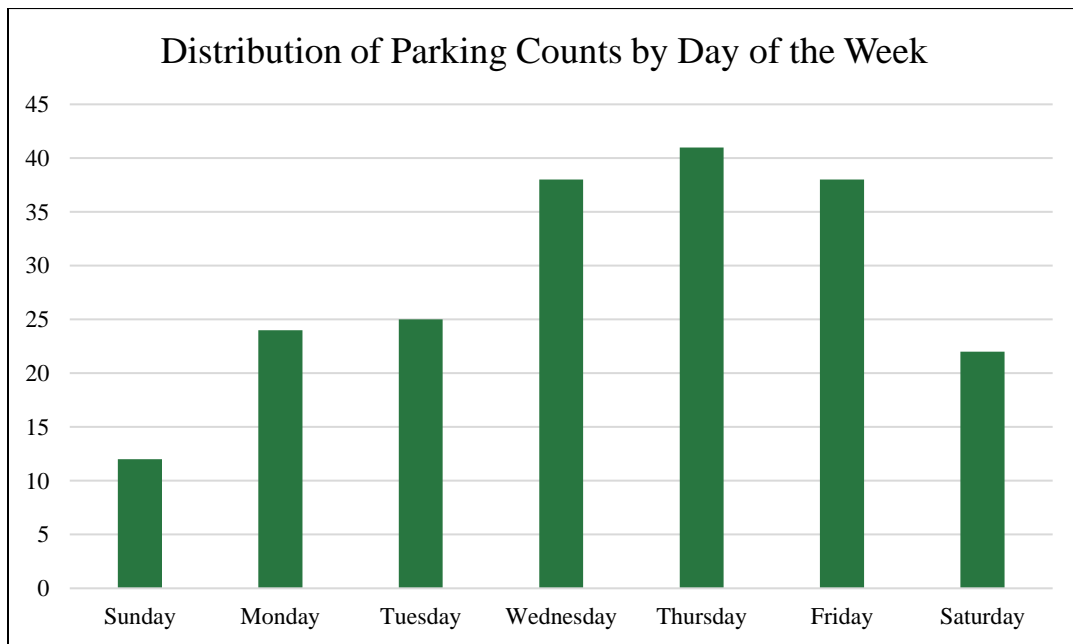


Figure A3

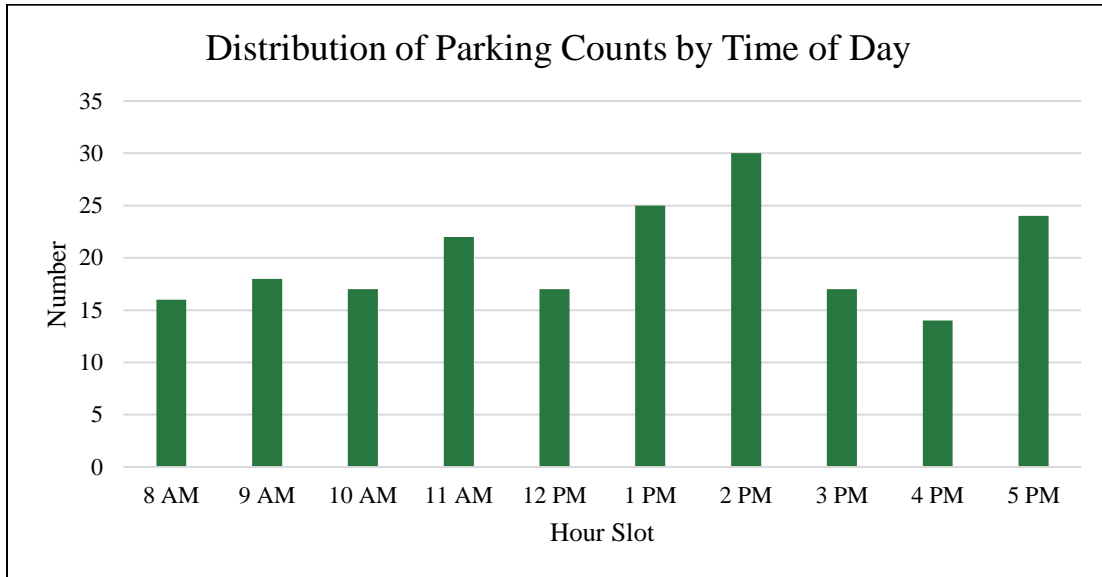


Figure A4

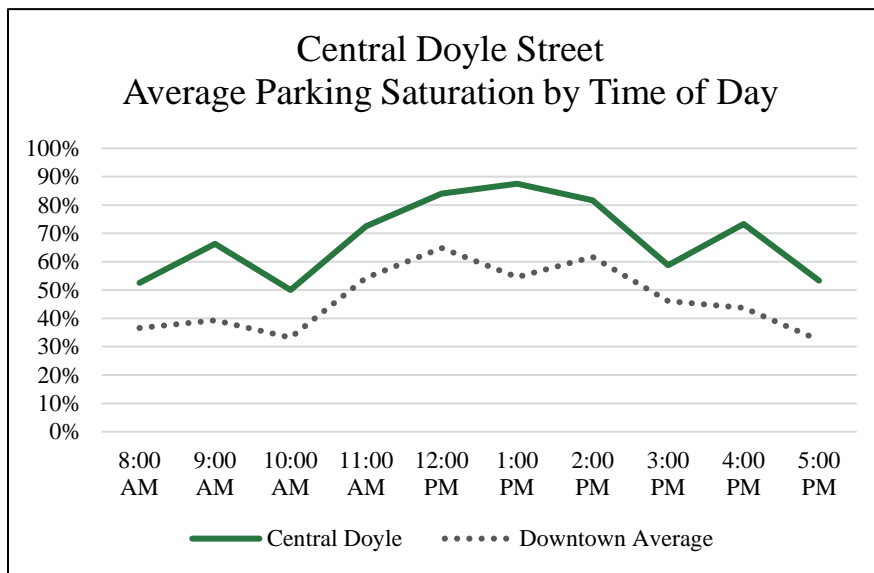


Figure A5

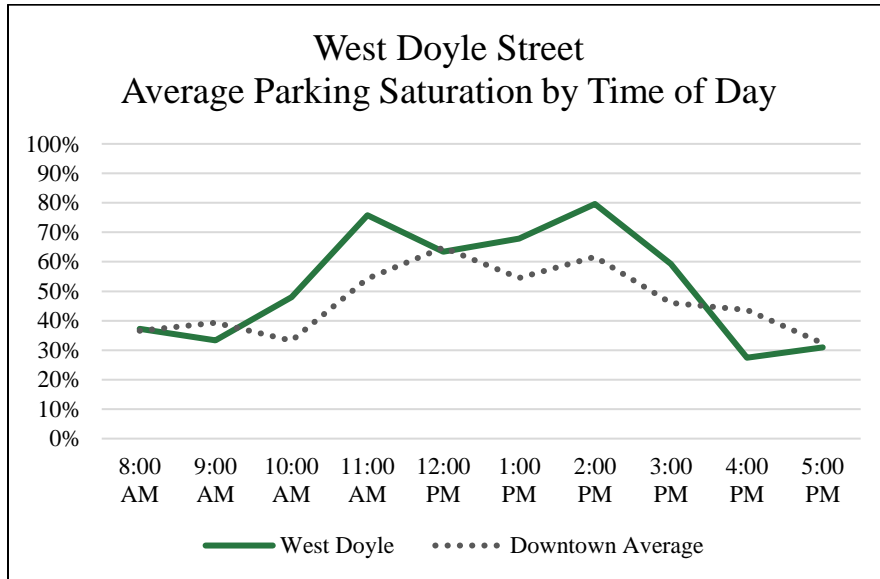


Figure A6

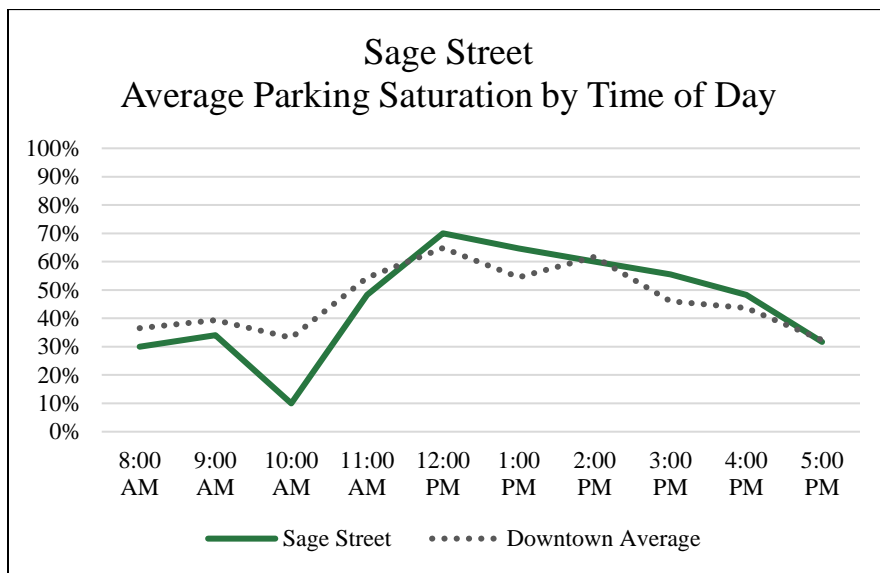


Figure A7

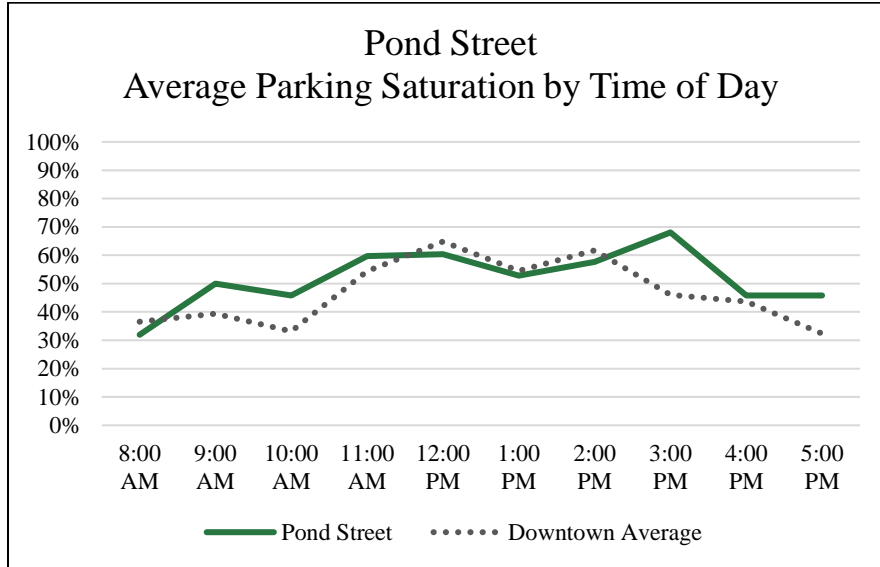


Figure A8

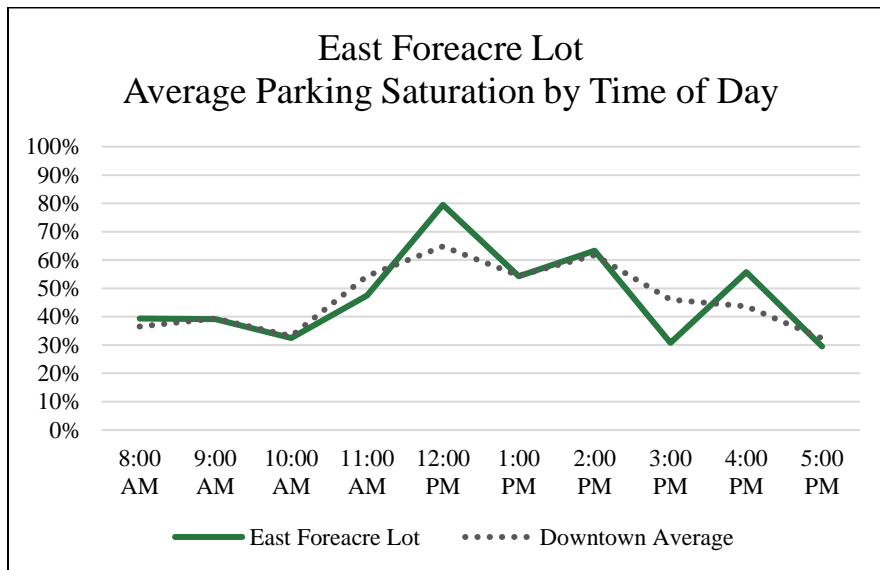


Figure A9

