



Restricted Parking Zone Policy Review Project

Final Recommendations



Managing a scarce parking resource

The City of Seattle Department of Transportation is committed to Seattle's vibrant residential and business districts. For many years, one issue has been excessive parking of non-resident vehicles on residential streets for extended periods of time. Starting in the late 1970's, the department (SDOT) has used restricted parking zones (RPZs, often called residential parking zones) to manage commuter and employee parking in residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.

SDOT initiated the RPZ Policy Review Project in late 2007 and released draft recommendations in late summer 2008. A broad, comprehensive public outreach from August - October 2008 resulted in over 500 substantive comments. This brochure presents the final recommendations based on these comments and a comprehensive review of best practices from cities around the country.

Project Purpose

In the last thirty years, SDOT's RPZ program has protected residential parking from traffic impacts of commuters, area employees, and others. The program has been designed to discourage spillover traffic impacts of commuters, area employees, and others in residential neighborhoods. RPZ signs vary in their restrictiveness for allowing non-resident parking in terms of hours and days of the week. Zones have expanded and been fine-tuned over the years. Many zones have multiple sub-areas in effect on different days, times, and hourly parking restrictions. There are 27 zones, in addition to two restricted areas for Husky Stadium football game days, as of March 2009.

The purpose of the RPZ Policy Review Project is to analyze and redesign the program to support Seattle's goals for transportation, neighborhood livability, sustainability, and economic development goals. Seattle's RPZ program was last reviewed in 1994. Since then, Seattle has changed dramatically with population growth and construction of major transit improvements, as well as adoption of a Comprehensive Plan Urban Village strategy that links business districts to residential neighborhoods through improved multi-modal access.

In scoping this RPZ Policy Review Project, SDOT found that current policy and technical requirements have, in some situations, fallen short of capturing complexities of neighborhood business and residential districts' parking problems and their causes. The program often fails to answer the key question of whether residents should be given priority parking over others in the public right-of-way. Other policy questions are whether aggressive efforts should be taken to manage permit demand, whether local business employees should be allowed zone access, and how to evaluate residential parking issues comprehensively.



Project Goals

The RPZ Policy Review Project is intended to design a new RPZ program that:

- reduces traffic impacts to neighborhoods from commuters who park around large parking demand generators,
- supports mixed-use neighborhoods and local business districts,
- continues to encourage reductions in energy use and vehicle emissions, and
- implements a program with simple rules that are easily understood and clearly applied.

In developing draft recommendations, SDOT incorporated extensive technical analysis, review of other cities' RPZ programs, and comments from residents, business owners, and major institutions in or near existing RPZs.

With these recommended changes, SDOT expects that vehicle air emissions, energy use, and vehicle trips would decrease where additional on-street parking restrictions are installed, as there is less opportunity for spillover traffic. Support for mixed use areas is illustrated by the business permit pilot program in the Sound Transit LINK light rail station areas and by changes to the community engagement process for new RPZs. SDOT is also implementing back-office improvements to permit issuance to improve customer experience.

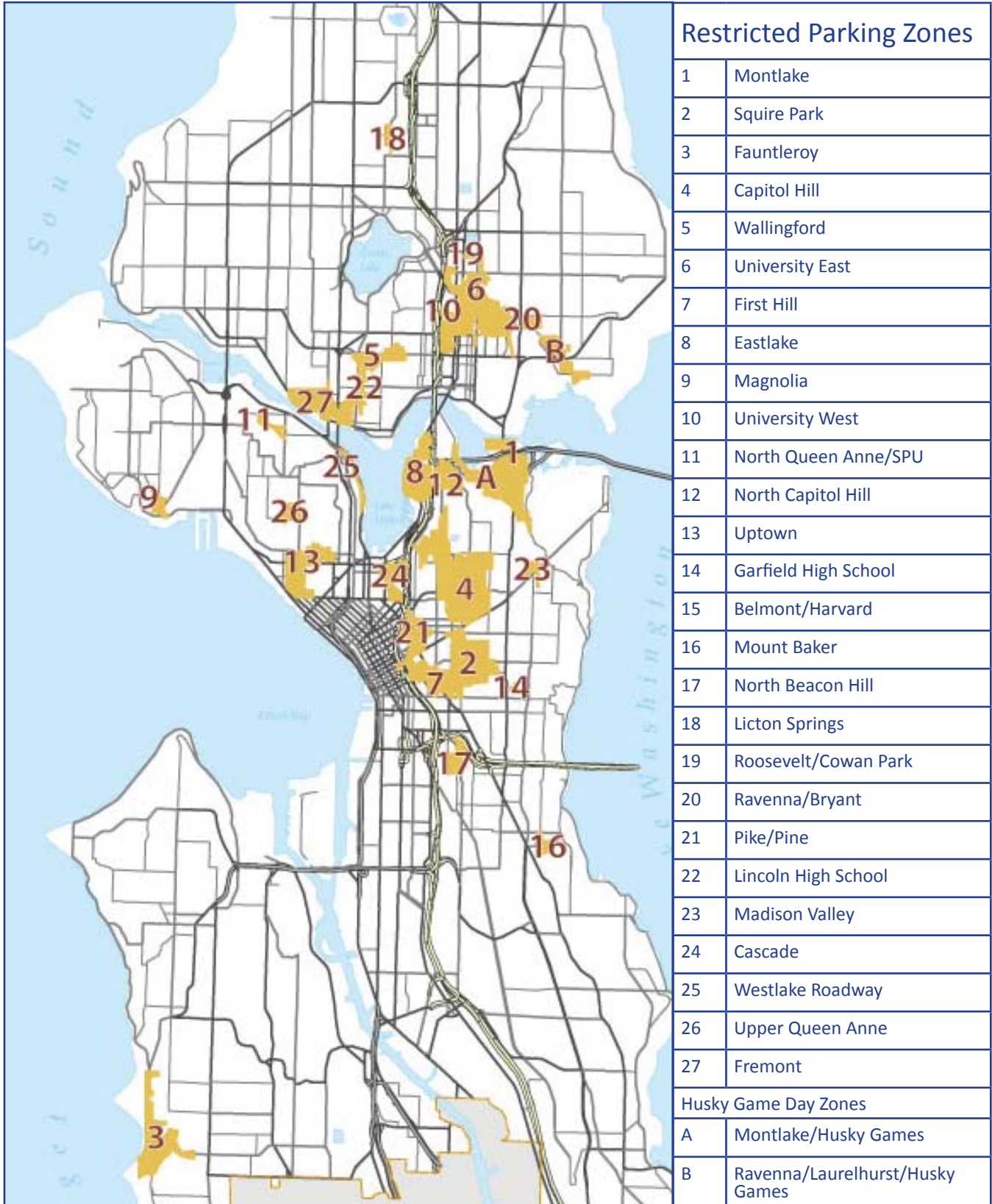
This brochure covers the following final issues and recommendations:

- Managing permit parking demand
- Permit eligibility
- Major Institutions RPZ policy
- New RPZs around LINK light rail stations
- Guest permit eligibility
- New zone creation process
- Zone modification process
- Zone removal process
- Parking enforcement
- Customer service

These final RPZ policy recommendations will be adopted into the Seattle Municipal Code. Additionally, a new Director's Rule will interpret Code language and establish specific standards for these final recommendations. A draft Director's Rule document is expected in Spring 2009 for public review. More information is available in the RPZ Policy Review Final Report.



Existing RPZs in Seattle



Current RPZ Public Process

Strengths

- Residents become invested in parking changes through RPZ design committee and petition process.
- Established process allows any interested stakeholders to attend RPZ design committee meetings.
- Creating a new RPZ zone can take several years; neighborhoods are not rushed through design and decision process. As people become more informed about the RPZs, they have time to reconsider their positions, for or against a zone, based on new knowledge.
- SDOT now has a city-wide community parking program with a schedule to work with several neighborhoods a year on many parking management strategies, including RPZs. Program is focused on customers, businesses, and residents; it includes multimodal analysis and solutions.

Weaknesses

- Established zone process works well for English speakers, citizens comfortable working with city programs, and people who want to reach out to their neighbors. If any of these situations are missing, an RPZ may not be installed on needed blocks or may be installed inappropriately.
- Only residents are allowed to give final approval through petition process; other voices are not counted at approval stage.
- The 75% / 25% resident / non-resident parking occupancy study test sets a low and restrictive bar for allowing visitor parking in neighborhood area.
- Zone creation process does not emphasize other parking management strategies before implementing an RPZ.
- Process can take several years; there can be little relief for parking problems meanwhile.
- Current process specifically addresses expanding RPZs but does not address other modifications to existing zones such as modifying or removing zones (e.g., if original traffic generator no longer present).



Public outreach summary

Starting early in 2008, SDOT reached out to key residential, business and institution stakeholders to gather an initial sense of people's views of the RPZ program. In Spring 2008, SDOT put out an on-line survey that obtained over 1,100 respondents. The survey was designed to gather feedback on experiences by residents, businesses, and others with obtaining permits, parking in or working near RPZs. Presentations were given to the Seattle Planning Commission, neighborhood groups, and many other stakeholders who either park in or are affected by restricted parking zones. SDOT held three sets of advisory group meetings called Sounding Boards, where interested residents, businesses association members, and major institution representatives were brought together to help SDOT understand different perspectives of RPZs.

Outreach activities

SDOT released draft recommendations in August 2008 and provided an 80-day public comment period through October 2008. Staff disseminated draft proposals widely and collected feedback from a wide range of stakeholders to help inform city decisions. Target audiences included residents, businesses, and institutions within and near RPZs, as well as neighborhood and community organizations, business groups, and chambers of commerce.

Numerous steps were taken to raise awareness and solicit feedback from the public, including:

- Project website
- On-line questionnaire
- Electronic comment form
- Postcard notice to community organizations and all RPZ permit holders
- Presentations to community and neighborhood businesses associations
- Media press release and articles in major and neighborhood newspapers

Results

SDOT's public engagement efforts increased awareness and gathered feedback successfully on the draft recommendations. During the public comment period:

- Over 8,000 people visited the project webpage (sixth most visited SDOT webpage during this time period)
- Over 6,000 people downloaded the RPZ Policy Draft Recommendations Summary
- Over 325 people completed the on-line questionnaire
- Almost 500 formal comments were submitted via email
- Twelve presentations were made to community meetings attended by over 270 people

In addition, many articles appeared in neighborhood papers, electronic blogs, and in daily papers. Several news radio stations carried the story. A front page story ran in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on August 1, 2008. Articles provided direct links to the project webpage and contact information.



Recommendations: Managing permit parking demand

How it works today

- Currently, eligible residents can obtain a permit for every registered vehicle.
- In many RPZs, there are more permits issued than there are on-street parking spaces, making it challenging for people to find open parking.
- Vehicles per household can vary greatly based on family size, income, and building type (e.g., apartments, large families, boarding houses).
- On average, SDOT has found that households obtain either one or two RPZ permits.
- In some zones, “car-ranchers” use RPZ permits to park 12 to 20 cars reportedly at a time, while cars are being worked on or up for sale.
- Permit fees are the same rate for multiple permits obtained by the same household.

Draft recommendations

- Limit permits per household address to equitably manage supply and demand of on-street parking for all users, based on zone conditions.
- Use a range of one, two or four permits per household address depending on zone parking supply and demand criteria.

Summary of comments

- Broad public recognition that there are currently too many permitted cars vying for a limited number of on-street spaces.
- Support for a system that generally limits permit sales.
- Great concern expressed for proposed limit of one or two permits per household address in the denser RPZs where people owned more vehicles than the proposed permit limit.
- Comments received from residents in households with more than four unrelated adults opposed such limits with concern about impacts to affordable group housing situations.

Final recommendations

- Do not sell more than eight permits per household address to control car-ranching and extreme abuse of RPZ permits; eight is the legal limit for unrelated people living at same address.
- Consider in future tighter limits or other disincentives for permit sales to manage parking demand.
- One option could be to implement a progressive fee structure to discourage purchasing multiple permits, where household’s request for the third through eight permits cost increasingly more than the first two permits.

Next steps toward implementation

- Adopt limit of eight permits per household address.
- Modify RPZ permit database to recognize eight-permit limit per household.

Recommendations: Permit eligibility

How it works today

- Currently permits are issued to residents, their guests, and service-related vehicles.
- Any resident may apply for a permit for a vehicle belonging to another resident (including an out-of-area vehicle) with appropriate documentation from owner.

Draft recommendations

- Tighten resident eligibility to require that vehicles be registered to applicant's address and in their name, consistent with Washington state law.

Summary of comments

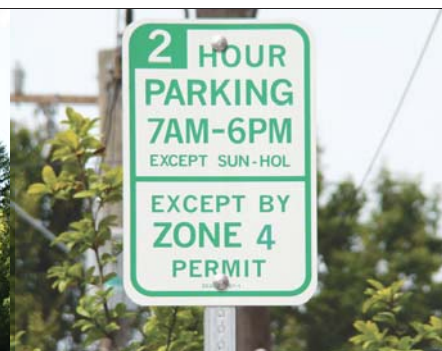
- Generally, people did not seem to be aware that RPZ permits can be available for routine home visitors (e.g., home health care or other service workers), but if they were aware, people wanted to maintain access to permits.
- Feedback was mixed related to limiting permits to vehicle address holders. Concern was expressed about limiting student access to group affordable housing. Others supported the changes to better address parking problems in university areas.

Final recommendations

- Keep authority for department to issue RPZ and guest permits to residents and others that need routine access in an RPZ zone, including property managers, home health care workers and shelter guests. List eligibility through new Director's Rule and post on-line for more access to information.
- Change policy so that residents must have their vehicles registered in their name and at the RPZ eligible address to be entitled to RPZ and guest permits.
- Set as policy goal that residents and guests should aim to park within six city blocks from their residence as way to reduce permit abuse.

Next steps toward implementation

- Include permit restrictions on vehicle matching household address in Seattle Municipal Code.
- Include detailed permit eligibility information in Director's Rule.



Recommendations: Major institutions RPZ policy

How it works today

- In several zones, RPZ payment is arranged to mitigate and prevent parking impacts from institutions' employees and other commuters in residential neighborhoods.
- In 12 RPZs, major institutions pay for all or part of RPZ and guest permit fees, as well as set-up installation costs for new zones.
- Seven major institutions and one movie theater contribute to permit fees, including University of Washington, Harborview Hospital, and the U-District's Metro Cinemas theater.
- Agreement for payment and other support is documented in major institution transportation master plans (TMPs), typically adopted by City Council.
- Mitigation levels are based on the specific parking impacts rather than standardized guidelines for all RPZs.

Draft recommendations

- Apply institution RPZ program contribution to program design and installation.
- Do not allow new or expanding major institutions to pay for permit or guest fees for individual residents.

Summary of comments

- Some support for adjusting TMPs to be more consistent with other RPZs where residents pay permit fees because there is no major institution involved.
- Residents submitted strong opposition in the U-District, Capitol Hill and Central District area zones to ending major institutions RPZ fee payment because parking and traffic impacts with the major institutions have not gone away.

Final recommendations

- Work with Major Institutions and RPZ stakeholders to standardize who pays permit fees in 12 zones where contributions are made.
- For new and expanding Major Institutions, limit permit fee payment to a subsidy of no more than two permits per household and for a time limit of one additional permit cycle.

Next steps toward implementation

- Meet with community stakeholders in the major institutions master planning process to discuss current RPZ zone rules and whether permit fees process can change to better meet City and neighborhood goals.
- Include changes in permit fees for any new or expanded RPZs for major institutions in Seattle Municipal Code.



Recommendations: Business permit pilot program

How it works today

- Separate from the RPZ Policy Review Project, SDOT considered whether to install seven restricted parking zones around the Sound Transit Initial Segment link light rail stations (from South Downtown to Rainier Beach) to prevent large numbers of transit riders from driving to and parking in stations areas.
- Many minority and refugee community business owners and employees use their personal vehicles for business purposes and therefore need to park nearby. Taking away parking access with an RPZ would negatively affect these businesses.
- Husky Stadium area zones allow businesses adjacent to the zone to obtain RPZ permits.

Draft recommendations

- Install RPZs within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the five Southeast Seattle light rail stations to discourage “hide-and-ride” parking with July 2009 Sound Transit opening.

Summary of comments

- Positive reaction received from Southeast Seattle area businesses that otherwise would not have access to on-street parking.

Final recommendations

- As a pilot program, allow access for employees with local businesses to RPZs in proposed link light rail RPZs.
- Set up pilot zones to test appropriate permit distribution, quantity, enforcement and tracking before considering expanding business permit access to other zones.
- Continue to allow businesses in Husky Stadium area zones to obtain RPZ permits.

Next step towards implementation

- Install RPZs before light rail stations open.
- Design and distribute employee permits.
- As pilot, test employee permit program and report to City officials in at least two years (one permit cycle) timeframe.



11 Recommendations: Guest permits eligibility

How it works today

- Every RPZ area household is eligible for one two-year guest permit (rearview window hang-tag).
- If people have more than one guest, they borrow permits or risk parking without guest permit. Otherwise, there is no convenient way to have a party when an RPZ is in effect.
- Guest permits are reported to be sold illegally to area employees who use them to park on-street near their workplace.

Draft recommendations

- Eliminate biennial guest permit and change to a multi-day coupon book system where each coupon is good for one day each, and allow up to 100 days of coupons per year.

Summary of comments

- Strong concern about eliminating the year-round guest permit.
- Many people disagreed that 100 days per year would be sufficient for guest visits and wanted daily passes equivalent to a full year (365 days).
- Confusion and concern expressed about whether new system would be costlier, and how and where purchase would be allowed.
- Support for changes to the hang-tag system that allows multiple guests to be accommodated.
- Interest in program changes to address abuse of guest permits.

Final recommendation

- Continue to issue one biennial guest permit per household address.
- Develop a single-day use guest permit as a second option, to offer residents change to have multiple guests over at one time (e.g., \$1 per day single-use pass with up to 50 days allowed per year).
- Issue biennial or daily guest permits to home-health care providers, bed and breakfast inns, and others with routine RPZ visitors, in lieu of RPZ permits.
- Make permit design changes to improve enforcement and reduce opportunities for re-sale.



Next steps toward implementation

- Design and issue single-use daily guest permits, keeping in mind SDOT operations and Parking Enforcement requirements.
- Re-design guest permit to improve enforcement effectiveness.

Recommendations: Creating new RPZ zone process

How it works today

- Seattle's existing restricted parking zones have been created in response to requests from residents affected by parking impacts of a major institution, transit riders, or neighborhood business district.
- To institute an RPZ, there must be at least five contiguous block faces of residential development, 75% occupancy during problem parking times, and at least 25% of those vehicles must be non-residents.
- Zones may be initiated by residents, by SDOT, or based on a major institution's planning process. Current steps:
 1. Neighborhood residents or community organization request new zone;
 2. SDOT evaluates request against requirements with a formal parking study;
 3. If study shows RPZ need, SDOT sets up design committee with area residents, businesses and others, who work to evaluate appropriate zone boundaries and hours of operation; and,
 4. Interested residents gather petition signatures for 60% of block residents to give formal approval.
- Stakeholders who oppose an RPZ have a difficult time having their voices heard during petition process.
- Stakeholders with cultural or language barriers or those in secured apartment buildings can face challenges in participating in petition process.

- Challenge to install zones in denser mixed use neighborhood business districts where parking needs of residents, visitors and customers often overlap.
- Nine RPZs operate during evening and raise questions about best way to manage neighborhood business area parking when transit service is less available for late-shift employees and restaurant/bar patrons.

Draft recommendations

- Revise design and decision-making process to ensure fairer and more effective community process to include all community interests, including businesses.
- Address race and social justice barriers to community participation; ensure that all neighborhoods have access to appropriate parking management tools, and all citizens have opportunity to participate in defining choices.
- Explore broader range of tools than solely RPZs to manage parking in mixed-use business district areas.

Summary of comments

- Concern that current process often pits neighbors against each other and fails to involve a broad circle of interests.
- Interest in a more flexible process and for one where SDOT takes more proactive role in ensuring broad community involvement.
- Concern about eliminating petition process as it is seen as an effective tool for residents to meet their neighbors and discuss common parking concerns, along with approving their block's parking changes.

Recommendations: Creating new RPZ zone process

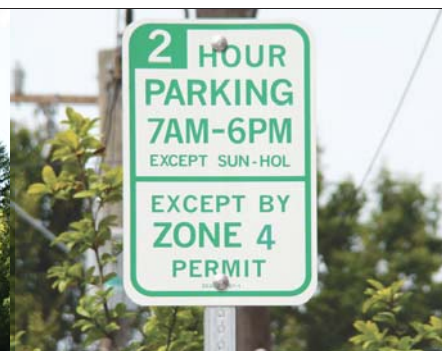
Final recommendations

- Emphasize and investigate other parking management tools before installing an RPZ, especially along residential streets that surround neighborhood business districts.
- Implement new process to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in discussion at level “playing field”.
- Require that at least 50% of vehicles (from 25%) are non-residential to help accommodate an increased level of visitor parking in and around neighborhood business districts.
- Require at least 10 contiguous city blocks (or 20 block faces) of residential development.
- New process:
 1. Community organization or group of residents request that SDOT consider RPZ for their area or SDOT includes request in community planning effort.
 2. SDOT reviews request for technical merits in a parking study.
 3. If conditions are met, SDOT sets up an RPZ design committee of interested community members.
 4. SDOT organizes RPZ design meetings and attend area stakeholder meetings to develop common understanding of parking problems.

5. Based on comments and parking study, SDOT issues draft RPZ recommendation and gathers feedback with mailings and other broad-based community engagement strategies.
6. SDOT Director of Traffic Management will review community comments on draft plan, and make final decision about whether to install zone.
7. Final decision is appealable under administrative appeal process to SDOT Director, similar to that used for SDOT’s Street Use permitting.

Next steps toward implementation

- Include new zone process in Director’s Rule.
- Train staff to follow new procedures.
- Standardize “study” efforts to be sure that utilization and percent of non-residential vehicles are clearly understood measures.



How it works today

- Zones can be modified with a petition process similar to that used to create zones, although modifying zones is generally less complex.
- Generally, zones are extended when parking problem has spread to nearby streets, and residents are interested in fulfilling petition process requirements. Similar process to remove zone from a particular block.
- If petition process is not successful on a particular block, (e.g., residents at the time oppose RPZ or access is difficult in secure apartment buildings), the zone will have missing blocks, causing unintended parking impacts.

Draft recommendations

- SDOT would evaluate existing zones, modify boundaries and hourly operating rules where appropriate to best meet City and neighborhood's goals.

Summary of comments

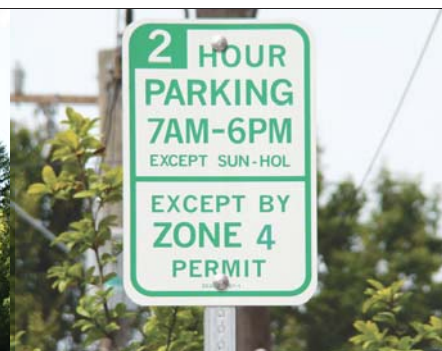
- Concern expressed by some stakeholders about the City imposing changes without adequate community and residential property owner review.

Final recommendations

- When two or more zones abut, consider restructuring zones to break at planning boundaries, such as city-designated neighborhood boundaries, by splitting large zones and combining smaller ones.
- Fix obvious gaps of streets without RPZ signs by engaging residents with the purpose of filling in zones.
- Do not use petition process as requirement to add or modify zones. Instead, use the following process:
 - Through a community parking plan: as part of draft plan development, include changes to RPZ blocks or design and solicit RPZ permit holder review. Make changes as appropriate based on community comments and professional judgment.
 - Through community-initiated application: review possible changes and make changes as appropriate based on community comments and professional judgment.

Next steps toward implementation

- Review zones as part of SDOT Community Parking Program.
- Include specific guidance in Director's Rule for the community process to modify.



How it works today

- No zones have been removed in RPZ program history.

Draft recommendations

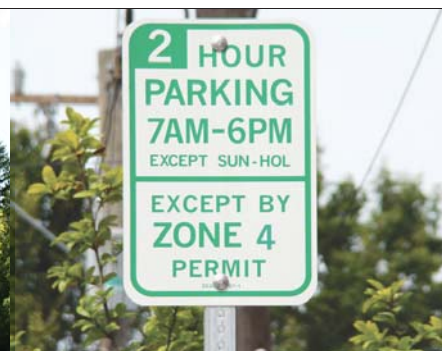
- Where zones routinely sell only a small number of permits, SDOT should work with citizens in the zone to confirm whether it is still needed and, if not, remove the zone.

Summary of comments

- No comments were received on this issue

Final recommendations

- Assign SDOT staff resources to review zones.
- Collect parking occupancy, traffic generator, and permit sales information to determine if zones are still effective.
- In Director's Rule, establish criteria covering parking occupancy, number of permits issued, and status of traffic generator (i.e., if traffic generator that caused zone creation has moved or no longer exists) to evaluate when a zone may be considered for removal.
- Use community process outlined for new zones to review possible changes with community.



How it works today

- There are not enough Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs) to routinely enforce all RPZ operating hours.
- RPZ and guest permits can easily be transferred or sold and used by commuters and others because of permit design and because in-field PEOs do not have access to real-time data confirming permit validity.
- Longer-term parking time-limits (e.g., three and four hours) are difficult to enforce.
- Wide variety of operating hours in different zones and within zones cause confusion amongst residents, other parkers and PEOs.

Draft recommendations

- Add Parking Enforcement Officers and dedicate more hours to enforcing RPZs.
- Use new technology to provide PEOs with in-field access to a database of valid permits and corresponding vehicle license numbers.
- Modify RPZ and guest permits to reduce fraudulent use.
- To the extent possible, establish consistent zone hours of operation.
- Establish fines for illegal sale and use of RPZ and guest permits as well as for improper display.
- Do not issue permits to motorcycles and scooters.

Summary of comments

- Comments supported additional parking enforcement, especially for zones with hours of operation at night and weekends.

- Support to change to a shorter time limit for non-RPZ permitted vehicles to improve enforcement effectiveness and reduce chances of ineligible vehicles parking in the RPZ area.
- Some comments supported idea to not require permits for motorcycles and scooters, while others were concerned about the Fautleroy Zone 3 in particular were ferry commuters on motorcycle might create unintended parking impacts.

Final recommendations

- Consider adding additional PEOs to dedicate more hours to RPZ enforcement.
- Use mobile license plate recognition and other new parking enforcement equipment to provide PEOs with in-field access to valid daily RPZ permit listings.
- Modify RPZ and guest permits to reduce fraud and add enforcement fines .
- Exempt motorcycle and scooters from RPZ permit requirements to ease confusion for permit issuance and placement.
- Define valid RPZ permit and guest permit to require parking within six blocks of eligible resident.

New steps towards implementation

- Purchase and use new enforcement technology.
- Re-design RPZ and guest permits to improve enforcement effectiveness.
- Evaluate zones to consider changing hours of operation and time-limits to improve enforcement effectiveness.

How it works today

- Residents applying for a new permit can find general program information online or via phone. However, to determine eligibility or to obtain an initial permit, residents must call the City and usually must go to City offices downtown to obtain permits. Applicants must provide paper copies of documents proving eligibility. Permits can be renewed by mail.
- Agreements are negotiated with certain agencies for distribution of some permits.
- Current RPZ program database software is outdated and does not support online applications, fee payment, renewals or reporting.

Draft recommendations

- Continue to allow residents to find information about the RPZ program by phone, and to apply and pay for permits in person, if they choose to do so.
- Establish with new software and database management, online capability so that people can check RPZ eligibility and purchase permits.
- Include capabilities for most customers to automatically verify eligibility online.

Summary of comments

- Strong support for shifting to an online system to avoid time and parking issues associated with having to come downtown.

Final recommendations

- Establish online system that allows people to find out if they live in a zone, and to apply and pay for permits.
- Allow single-day guest permits to be ordered and purchased online.
- Work with other agencies to automatically verify residency and vehicle registration.

Next steps towards implementation

- Continue to develop new administrative system to support online processing, eligibility verifications, payment and enhanced reporting.
- Set up agreements with other government agencies to automatically verify residency and vehicle registration.



More Information

Websites with more details

Please visit SDOT's RPZ Policy Review Project on the web.

http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/parking/rpz_policy_review.htm

The website includes the following project reports:

Residential Parking Zone Policy Review Project, Draft Final Report

Residential Parking Zone Policy Review Project, Survey Results

Residential Parking Zone Policy Review Project, Best Practices

Contact

If you have additional questions about these recommendations, please contact Mary Catherine Snyder by email: marycatherine.snyder@seattle.gov or by phone: 206-684-8110.