

## The Price of Parking

*New Downtown development has put a crunch on parking and, as demand is increasing, so are prices.*

BY EMILY THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL FISHEL

In September 2013, the city condemned a parking garage near the corner of East Long and North Third streets. Following an inspection, the city deemed the deteriorating garage too dangerous for use. Ceilings were cracking in multiple spots, and concrete had fallen on walkways and at least one parked vehicle. The 564 spaces in the garage represented only a fraction of the more than 77,000 total Downtown parking spaces, but the loss of those spaces added to a growing parking availability problem in the neighborhood. And that problem led to a spike in parking prices this year.

“From Broad Street north up to Spring, we’re seeing a huge parking crunch happen right now,” says Marc Conte of Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District, which represents Downtown property owners. “We’re seeing the supply go down and the demand go up. South of [Capitol Square], the Columbus Commons garage has been able to absorb workers as that office space fills up. But when (mixed-use development) 250 High opens, that’ll put more of a crunch on that Commons garage.”

It’s no secret Downtown is experiencing a renaissance. With incoming businesses and

new housing have come an influx of new Downtown workers and residents. “The real estate market is very strong Downtown,” says city planning administrator Vince Papsidero. “There’s continuing demand for housing, and we expect following that there will be demand for office space.” Those new workers and residents need a place to park.

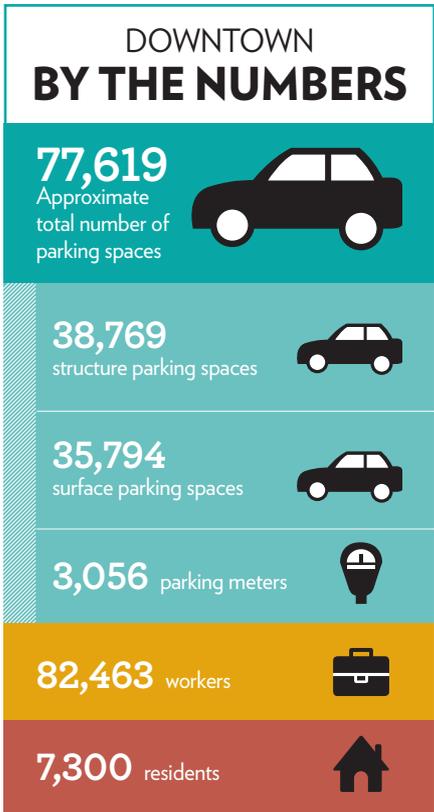
To help offset the increasing demand for parking, the city has added more meters along High Street. “We’ve tried to add parking meters wherever we can,” says Steve Schoeny, director of the Department of Development. They’ve also adjusted meter restrictions. “We took rush-hour parking restrictions off of the meters so people can now park at about 120 meters [Downtown],” says Rick Tilton of the Department of Public Service.

But the city hasn’t built a public parking garage in six years. Instead, they’re encouraging developers to include more parking in their plans, Schoeny says, adding the number of Downtown residential units has tripled in recent years. Many of those developments, like 250 High, are being built on former surface parking lots. “Some of those have absorbed some of the surface parking. If you take the developments that Jeff Edwards

has done, those are on former surface lots,” Schoeny says of the developer of the Neighborhood Launch condominiums on Gay Street. In fact, the 2010 Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan points to surface lots as potential land for development. “The perspective in the Downtown plan was that surface parking is an opportunity to attract new buildings,” Papsidero says. “I think it’s safe to say there’s a lot of interest Downtown for some of the surface lots, particularly those on the corridors or in the core of Downtown.”

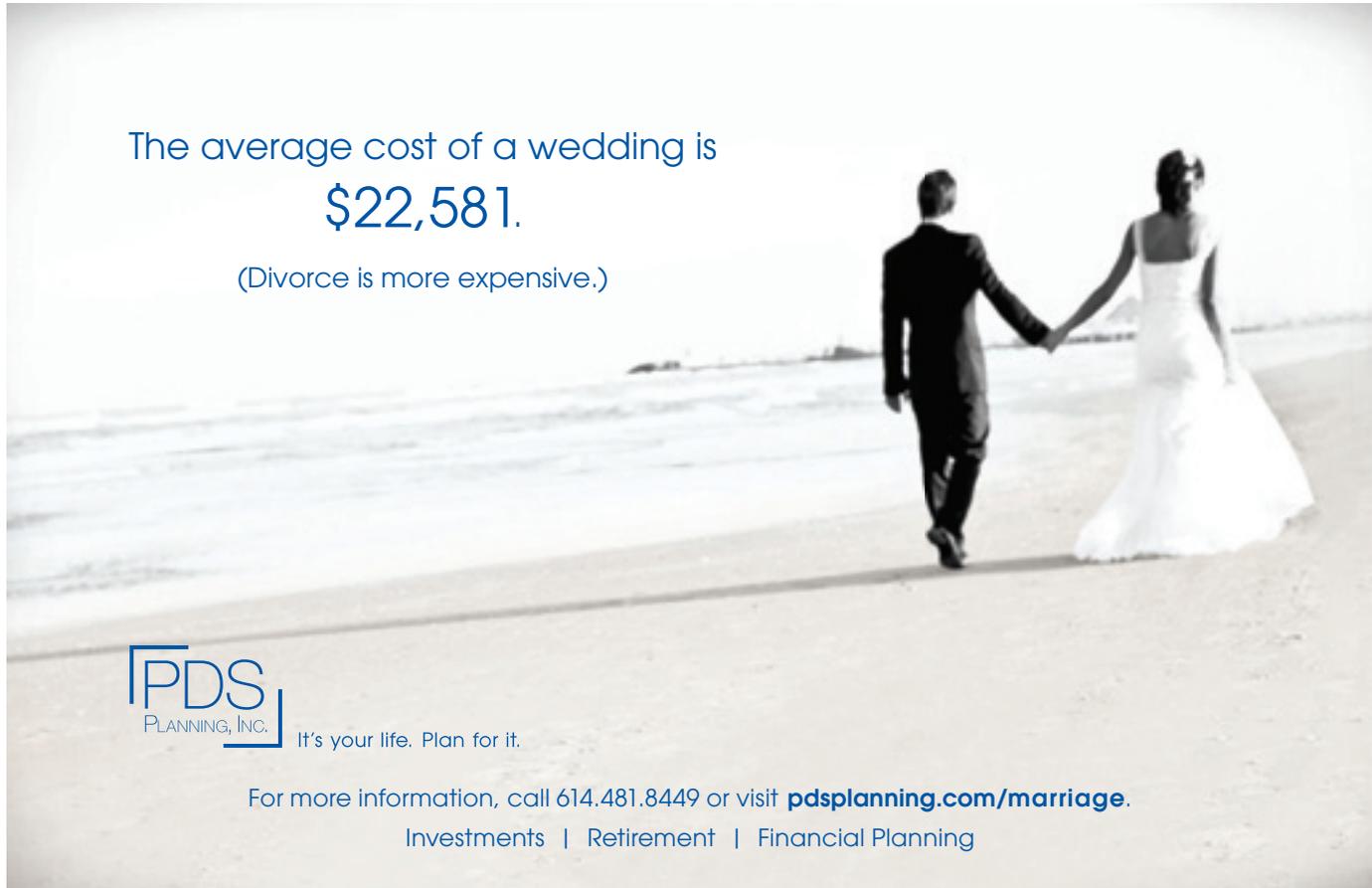
This decrease in supply has also contributed to the rising demand for parking. “I remember talking to a garage probably a couple weeks ago, and I think they were at a four- to six-week waiting list,” Conte says. “Waiting lists have gotten longer,” says Thomas Hagerman of parking management company SP+, which oversees 22 parking garages and 29 surface lots in Columbus. Joel Furno, owner of parking management company ParkOps, has also noticed a shift. “What’s happening is the central lots around High Street are at occupancy around 100 percent,” Furno says. “There’s more availability the further east you go.”

Higher demand, of course, means higher prices, and the city doesn’t regulate rates for



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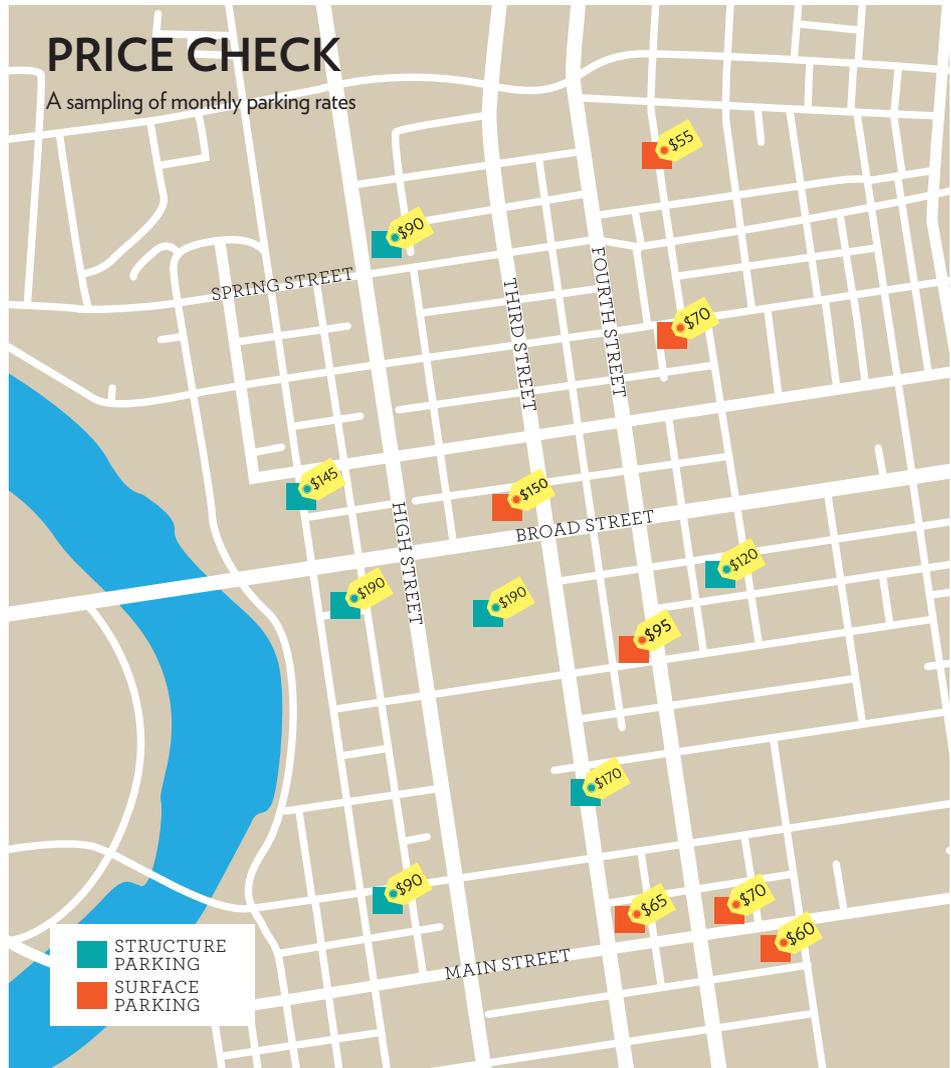
privately owned parking. Conte says he's seeing rates increase across the neighborhood, particularly north of Capitol Square. "We have seen the average monthly parking rate go up," he says. "The price of parking varies greatly, depending on convenience. The lots by COSI and Vets Memorial are about \$55 a month, while parking near the LeVeque is going to be more than \$200 a month."

Furno says ParkOps hasn't significantly increased rates for its four Downtown surface lots, which range in monthly prices from \$70 to \$150, but he's noticed daily rates at nearby lots going up. "Rates at any given location normally increase each year depending on demand as well as the tenant lease obligations," says Hagerman, who declined to disclose monthly parking prices for SP+'s garages and lots. "In some leases, parking rates are fixed and can only increase by a designated percentage. Because we are a management company, our clients make the ultimate decision on whether to implement a rate increase and, if so, by how much." Connecticut-based LAZ Parking, which manages all Ohio State University parking as well as 11 Downtown garages, offers monthly parking from \$90 for a garage at Front and Rich streets to \$170 for the Columbus Commons underground garage, the contract for which the company acquired in October.

Although Downtown parking has become an issue, Conte says it's a byproduct of the neighborhood's revitalization. "I would say most of it's a very positive problem to have, but a problem nonetheless," he says. "Any vibrant, urban, commercial neighborhood worth going to is going to have a parking problem." And he doesn't foresee the problem being resolved anytime soon. "I think it's going to get worse before it gets better. If a new garage were to get built Downtown, even if they were to break ground today, we're still probably looking at 18 months."

So what's the best short-term solution for people who work, live or play Downtown? It depends on who you ask. While the city's encouraging developers to build more parking, Capital Crossroads is encouraging employers to give workers equal commuter benefits for parking and public transportation. "We're encouraging that level playing field," Conte says. "We're hoping that will shift people to transit or biking or walking."

Meanwhile, the Central Ohio Transit Authority is increasing its reach. Through-



Sources: parkme.com, lazparking.com, parking management companies

out COTA's network, ridership during peak boarding times is up from last year: Between 6:30 and 9:30 a.m. on weekdays, boardings are up 2.4 percent, and weekday boardings between 3 and 6 p.m. are up 2.9 percent. This year, the bus system hired a consultant to do a transit-system review. "What they've recommended is a higher frequency network, so buses that come every 10 to 15 minutes on our high-frequency lines," spokeswoman Lisa Knapp says. (High-frequency lines include those that go through Downtown.) The addition of COTA's CBUS—the free circulator that goes from German Village to Victorian Village—has also attracted more riders, including commuters. "We certainly have commuters," Knapp says. "I think there are people who are parking further away and taking the CBUS because maybe parking is a little cheaper on the end of the CBUS line."

Conte admits taking the bus isn't for everyone. "For a lot of people, it's about a midday

escape valve," he says. "They worry that if they take the bus, they're stuck Downtown. But now with Car2Go, they really do have an escape valve."

"In order for Downtown to stay competitive, we do need to accommodate people who want to drive here," he continues. "But people who want to be urban really have to think about what that means. In other cities, that means walking, biking and taking transit." Schoeny agrees there's a balance between parking and development. "A parking space could otherwise be someone's apartment, albeit a small apartment," he says. "That's going to be the decision we have to make, between parking and new development."

For Schoeny, a long-term solution means having a bigger-picture conversation. "Long-term, it's not a discussion about parking. It's about public transportation. We are the largest metropolitan area in the U.S. without a rail or light rail system."