

Driving Economic Development with Proactive Parking Management

Compact downtown districts can pose several challenges to city managers and administrators. One issue in particular, is leasing and maintaining adequate public parking for patrons and visitors. This is especially true of downtown areas that are experiencing revitalization, such as Wilmington, North Carolina, a historic community that once served as a major port city and is now a flourishing business center and tourist destination.

In an effort to ensure on-street spaces are available for visitors and shoppers, the City of Wilmington recently re-instituted parking meters, which had been removed in the 1970s. Seen as an economic development tool to improve the downtown experience, money from the meters and other parking spaces downtown are managed through an enterprise fund. This fund was designed to finance maintenance of parking assets and facilities to better serve downtown patrons. Resources from the enterprise fund also cover the cost of managing the parking program.

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The re-institution of these parking meters has increased the city’s inventory of available downtown parking by almost 20 percent, an overwhelming amount for an administration that had no in-house parking manager and relied on an outside contractor to manage the 2,500 on- and off-street parking spaces available downtown.

Recognizing the need to improve its parking management program, the City of Wilmington hired Betty Gurganus in 2003 as its first-ever parking manager. Gurganus maintained the relationship with the outside contractor and the two worked together to manage the city’s parking services.



“There were not a lot of resources readily available for parking management at the time. As a result, the city wanted to bring in a company who could effectively run the operation from top to bottom,” said Gurganus.

Wilmington is one of many municipalities that manage its parking operations through an outside contractor. According to Gurganus, the city appreciates the benefits of working with a worldwide company that has experience and knows which tools to use to run a successful parking operation. “With our limited resources and manpower we needed a company that had experience in on- and off-street municipality parking practices that could issue tickets, collect them and maintain Grade A parking facilities — basically run the program for us,” she said.

In early 2006, Gurganus took the opportunity to work with the city’s contractor to improve the outdated parking system and tasked them with finding a parking solution that could adequately support the city’s growing number of parking spaces. “The old parking system was archaic and just basically worked as a financial parking system,” says Gurganus. “You could not go back and easily retrieve data or notes which really made it hard to service customers effectively.”

T2 Parking Solutions

Gurganus had previously worked as the parking manager for University North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) for seven years, where she used PowerPark by T2 Systems to manage campus parking. Her experience led her to consider T2's software as an option to help build a strong parking infrastructure. After careful deliberation and extensive research, Gurganus and her contractor chose T2 Flex™ by T2 systems. "When Flex became an option, I realized it was what the city needed. It allowed us to tailor the system, add modules if we so desire and the DMV connection is very important."

Gurganus said the functionality and flexibility of T2 Flex were the main reasons she encouraged her outside contractor to consider T2 Flex. "There were certain standards we were looking for. We needed the functionality to look up customers by ticket number, license plate number or even by name," she said.

In March 2006, the City of Wilmington went live with T2 Flex and improvements were realized immediately. According to Gurganus, they can now access and pull information whenever needed from one central database. "In the past tickets were collected using a system that correlated issued tickets to our database and converted them into alpha numeric codes. It was nearly impossible to effectively serve customers in a timely matter. Now, when I pull up a ticket we can see all the information for that customer, which allows us to make special arrangements in certain situations for customers with extenuating circumstances."

The city of 93,000 now issues more than 35,000 citations per year, grossing nearly 1.8 million annually, all of which is used to spur economic expansion in the historic downtown area.



The system also allows Gurganus to compare the number of tickets issued by her contractor to the number of tickets issued by local law enforcement agencies and the fire department. "We can now search the number of tickets issued on a particular street and research how long it has been since citations were issued in the area and why. Simply put, the system better helps us serve our customers, which is very important to us."

Although the city does not implement every function that T2 Flex offers, such as online citation payments, Gurganus admits it's nice to have the function available for future use. "Flex's versatility will allow us to purchase different applications as the parking program gets bigger and the expectations of our customers grow, which is nice."

For more information on T2 Systems, please call 800-434-1502 or visit www.t2systems.com.