

**September 16, 2024**

**TO:** Three Forks Zoning and Planning Board

**FR:** Randy Carpenter  
Planning Consultant to the City of Three Forks

**RE:** Downtown Parking Survey

The Three Forks Growth Policy encourages the enhancement of the downtown area as an economic strategy. In fact, the first goal of the “Our Economy” section of the Growth Policy is to enhance the downtown; some of the policies include: “Identify the needs and opportunities available to serve existing commercial enterprises” and “attract more retail, restaurant, and entertainment options.”

A significant barrier to the downtown enhancement is the parking requirements in the Three Forks Zoning Ordinance. For example, if someone wanted to start a restaurant in a new building in the Central Business District (CBD) that would be the size of the Iron Horse Café (approximately 1,850 square feet), they would have to provide 15 off-street parking spaces. Those 15 spaces, with drive aisles, would require over 3,000 square feet of space – almost double the size of the building itself.

Another strategy for enhancing the downtown is to encourage residences above commercial buildings. Many studies have shown that downtown residents shop downtown businesses much more than other community residents and are an effective way to enhance downtowns. However, the establishment of, for example, 5 condos or apartments above a Three Forks downtown business would require 8 off-street parking spaces – over 2,000 square feet of space in the most valuable properties in the community.

Staff undertook a parking survey in July and August of this year to better assess the available on-street parking in the CBD. Staff counted occupied and unoccupied parking spaces on different days of the week and at different times of day for 18 days. The survey covered on-street parking spaces on Main Street from the Sacajawea Hotel block to Elm Street, and one block (both to the east and west of Main Street) of the side streets in that stretch (Ash, Birch, Cedar, Date, and Elm Streets).

A summary of the survey results is below:

All downtown on-street parking spaces: 239 spaces  
Average percent occupancy: 37% occupied, 63% unoccupied  
Average number of unoccupied spaces: 151

Non-Main Street on-street parking spaces: 90  
Average percent occupancy: 39% occupied, 61% unoccupied  
Average number of unoccupied spaces: 55

A tally of off-street, non-Main Street spaces that were unoccupied, by date, is included below.

Note: Non-Main Street parking was counted separately from parking spaces on Main Street; if parking requirements for overnight uses (e.g., residences) were relaxed or eliminated, the State may object to the City allowing on-street parking spaces to be used for residences on a State road (Main Street).

It certainly appears from observation and from actual counting of empty parking spaces that there is ample unused parking available downtown. In other words, there is not a “parking problem” downtown, and as the Zoning Ordinance is updated – or before – a relaxation of parking requirements in the CBD should be considered.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Empty Non-Main Street Parking Spaces</b>
7/1/2024	55
7/3/2024	58
7/9/2024	70
7/10/2024	62
7/12/2024	55
7/12/2024	49
7/16/2024	53
7/18/2024	21
7/23/2024	58
7/25/2024	58
7/26/2024	43
7/29/2024	49
8/1/2024	39
8/2/2024	61
8/15/2024	56
8/21/2024	63
8/27/2024	73
8/28/2024	60
Total	983
Average	55
Median	57
Mode	58
High	73
Low	21