

# CAN'T FIND PARKING DOWNTOWN? TRY ONE OF THE 11,152 SPACES WE FOUND

Most everyone seems to think that there aren't enough parking spaces in downtown Lafayette. Well, not to go all contrarian on you, but here's a fun fact: we went out and counted each and every parking space we could find (not including the BART parking lots), and it turns out that there are 11,152 spaces in and around the downtown – one for every household in Lafayette! That's worth repeating: **There is one parking space downtown for every household in the City.** And, moreover, there are almost always a few spaces available at any given time, even in the most popular downtown blocks!

So then, why the hue and cry heard throughout town about the lack of parking? Well, there are essentially two reasons. First, the spaces are just not always located *exactly* where you want them to be. Sound familiar? That's because downtown Lafayette has a "strip" (rather than a "grid") orientation – and this longitudinal configuration makes for longer walking distances between popular shopping and gastronomic destinations. So, in a very real way, the parking situation in Lafayette is actually "historic." We are dealing, sometimes on a daily basis, with an artifact of our origins as a town that developed along a regional highway. The result is that our thousands of parking spaces are spread all along a two-mile stretch of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and not concentrated where they might be most useful to us now in the modern world.

Second, even if the parking spaces were conveniently located, they would not always be available to everyone at any given time. Businesses zealously guard their coveted parking spots and discourage non-patrons through signage and active parking patrols. Thus, while there is, in fact, plenty of parking in downtown Lafayette, there is often a shortage of **convenient and available parking**, and these popular spots are definitely a scarce resource at certain times of the day. All of us have experienced the frustration of not being able to park **close** to where we want to go.

How, then, does one ensure that there are at least a few conveniently located parking spaces available throughout the downtown at all times of the day? Ask any economist – and there are quite a few economists around town – and they will tell you that the best way to allocate a scarce resource is to put a price on it. Welcome, parking meters! The goal of metering

parking spaces is to ensure there is adequate turnover that allows, theoretically anyway, everyone to park. Some might remember that before the meters were installed in the La Fiesta parking lot, it was usually full and there were often no spots available at all. Today – thanks to those dreaded parking meters – there are always a few open spaces near Chow and the Cooperage, two of our most popular eateries. Both of these private lots are metered and anyone can park in them as long as they drop a few coins into the meter (or swipe a card).

## Which Meters are Public, and Which Are Private?

The parking meters installed in private parking lots like La Fiesta Square, Fiesta Lane and some of the spaces behind Town Center were installed by the owners of those properties, not the City of Lafayette. The Lafayette Police Department does not enforce the time limits or meters in these private lots, it only does so on Lafayette's public streets and in our public parking lots. Additionally, the City does not receive any money from private parking meters or lots.

The City *does*, however, get money from the meters on public streets and in lots, and this money goes not only towards the maintenance of the meters and the cost of the parking enforcement officers, but also towards creating more parking. For example, the City recently used money collected from parking meters and fines to purchase the Oakbridge lot on Golden Gate Way, in September 2016, which added 24 more public spaces. However, as we've said before, the primary goal of parking meters is to generate turnover, not to make money.

You don't need an economist to tell you that paying for convenient parking is, after all, a choice each of us makes. If you despise the one-armed bandits, you can park a few blocks away and get some exercise while heading to your destination. Or, of course, you can leave the car at home and get even more exercise! Regardless, we understand why many people feel that having to pay for parking is, well, wrong given that parking in many smaller cities (including Lafayette) was free for so long. No one loves parking meters, but once you understand why the meters are there (stopping BART commuters and other long-term parkers from hogging spaces) and appreciate how effective they are in circulating the most convenient parking spaces in town, the meters make more sense.



Parking isn't as scarce in Lafayette as some might believe. And those pesky parking meters actually have a purpose.

## A Reconstituted Planning Commission for Lafayette

It seems ages ago, but some of you may remember that back in March, a City Council vote adopting a revised conflict of interest policy for Planning and Design Review commissioners triggered a mass resignation of five of the seven members of the Planning Commission. In the past six months, the Council has been busy interviewing commissioner candidates, and has named five new members so that the Commission is back to its full complement of seven

members. Since April, the Council has appointed Farshad Farzan, Stephen LaBonge, Gregory Mason, Anna Radonich, and Kristina Strum, who join Gary Huisingh (Chair) and Steven Bliss (Vice Chair), on the reconstituted Planning Commission. You can read about the Commission's work and see the dates of the Commissioners' terms at [www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/commissions-committees/planning-commission](http://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/commissions-committees/planning-commission).