

MEMORANDUM

To: Richard Larson
President, University Senate
via email to: richard.larson@stonybrook.edu

From: Thomas C. Wilson, Jr.
Chair, University Senate University Environment Committee
email: thomas.wilson@stonybrook.edu

Date: March 2, 2023.

Re: Parking history and thoughts.

As you know, parking is part of the charge to the University Environment Committee (UEC). For years, we have done our best to engage the Administration regarding this issue, but were as blindsided by the recent announcement as anyone.

I went back through my records and came up with some timeline points:

November 2019: University engages Timothy Haas and Associates to perform a parking study. UEC member Mona Ramonetti is appointed a Senate representative to the "Parking Working Group" and attends meetings. I participate in one focus group, then COVID hits and everything appears to shut down.

March 2021: Ramonetti and I get word that the Tim Haas parking study is completed - apparently it was finished without following through on several announced items, for example a campus wide survey (which could have been easily done despite lockdown). When I asked for a copy of the Haas report from Terence Harrigan, he said that it had just been presented to senior administration and was not public yet.

April 2021: Dean Tufts proposes Senate representation on the new Parking Advisory Board (PAB). The Senate Executive Committee appoints Kenneth MacDowell and myself as Senate representatives.

September 16, 2021: After several months of administrators coming and going, PAB meets for the first time, chaired by Harrigan. The Haas report is distributed but we are asked not to share the report beyond the PAB. I expressed concern to you via email regarding this lack of transparency: how can we be effective representatives of the Senate if we are asked to keep such materials confidential, even from the Senate Executive Committee?

October 18, 2021: Kendra Violet becomes Executive Director of Parking and Transportation and Chair of PAB.

12/13/2021: PAB meets. No minutes were distributed to me, but I do remember some mention of moving to a paid parking model in the long term after discussion and negotiation with the unions.

12/24/2021: Violet emails the PAB, stating they were "pressing pause" on notifying the unions regarding any negotiations on parking until they obtained an external review of the finances. I would guess this is about when they started the process to engage the firm (EFPR Group) that is mentioned on the MAPS parking page:

https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/mobility-and-parking/parking/Parking_Fall2023.php

1/10/2022: PAB meets.

2/4/2022: Violet emails PAB, states that there would be a "suspension" of monthly meetings during reorganization of Parking and Transportation into Mobility and Parking Service (MAPS).

10/5/2022: I email Violet asking about the status of the Parking Advisory Board and pose some specific questions regarding underused parking adjacent to the LIRR station.

11/9/2022: Violet is the invited guest expert at a UEC meeting. She gave about a 45 minute presentation followed by open discussion. Minutes are here, as you can see there is no mention of an imminent proposal for quickly changing to an all-paid parking model at SBU:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nFjlTVRAX9afHFMRFJjRQFQvV0Jv9Ac8/view>

2/10/2023: MAPS issues the proposal to move to an all paid parking model at SBU by Fall 2023.

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My thoughts on the current situation:

1) Article 38 of the UUP Contract explicitly requires all increases or decreases in parking fees be negotiated. It is clear that UUP will be vigorously negotiating the financial aspects of this proposal, and I expect the same will be true of the other campus unions. No union is going to give up the benefit of free parking without getting something in return.

2) I have already received feedback from colleagues regarding real problems for this plan beyond the significant financial burden.

2a) A "free for all" where commuter students, faculty, and staff compete for the same spaces.

2b) No provision and no incentive for anyone with part-time alternative transportation (bicycling on good weather days, carpooling some days, remote working, etc.).

2c) No obvious provision for someone to park in one zone most days (for example South Campus) while still being able to park in another zone occasionally (to attend a meeting on the Central Campus).

Had there been communication during the development of the proposal, these issues could have been discussed and solutions possibly found.

3) MAPS is crying poverty because they are IFR account supported and have insufficient income to cover their very real costs. But who made the decision to "unbundle" parking costs from the main budget onto an IFR, and when, and why? My guess is that an IFR was created to receive parking fines. and then garage fees, and then during a fiscal crisis someone said "hey why can't we get that IFR to pay for even more?"

Solving budget shortfalls by offloading costs onto IFR accounts and then charging a fee for something newly defined as optional seems to be increasingly common at SBU. One other example is fees for laboratory courses - I guess because being a science major is optional? When I went to college there were no such fees. We paid the same tuition whether you were an English major studying (provided) books in the library or a Biology major studying (provided) fruit flies in the genetics lab.

4) Given the history above, it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that university officials walked away from the principles of shared governance by concealing the development of the parking proposal. As a consequence, now the Administration not only has to play “catch up” in addressing significant flaws in the current proposal, they will have to do so while dealing with a fair amount of anger from the community that is not entirely unjustified.

5) The situation is all the more unfortunate when it is measured against what I consider a great success of shared governance in the University’s response to COVID-19. As you know, I was privileged to serve as one of the Senate’s representatives to the COVID Recovery Committee. During the crisis we met weekly and the university communicated clear and detailed information. Senate representatives asked tough questions developed on our own and received from others. In my experience we got straight answers - even if the answer was “we don’t know” - and were able to take that up-to-date information back to the community. I take great pride in having been part of that process - and in the fact that we were the only SUNY University Center campus that never had to close because of high COVID case numbers. Coincidence? I think not.

Bottom line: we are here now; there is no going back. The solutions to parking issues will have to be solved in an atmosphere that is more contentious than it had to be. Regardless, UEC stands ready to assist in re-establishing dialogue with the administration and working to help develop solutions.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions or would like any specific actions from UEC going forward. Thank you for your support of UEC and your service to the Senate and our University.