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Essex Center Parking Strategy Final Report

October 2016

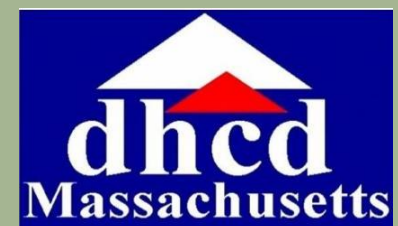




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Introduction

Introduction

This report was prepared on behalf of the Town of Essex through a “Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance Program” competitive grant from the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The Town staff of Essex provided oversight and review of the parking management plan, final report, and final presentation. In addition, Town businesses, residents, visitors, and employees provided insight and input into this study through a series of stakeholder meetings and a public open house held in June, 2016. On behalf of DHCD and the Town of Essex, the study team would like to thank all stakeholders and public participants for their constructive inputs to this process.



Background and Understanding

The Town of Essex is located 30 miles north of Boston on Massachusetts' North Shore. The Essex River runs through the Town Center and feeds Essex Bay. With about 3,500 residents, the Town is less populated than others nearby, but it draws a significant number of regional and local visitors. Seafood, waterfront tourism, and the flourishing antiques trade in Essex Center attracts significant visitor traffic, especially in the summer months. Restaurants such as Woodman's have customers waiting in lines in the summer that often stretch out onto the street. The Essex Marina, located in the Town Center, serves boaters across the region, and provides docking, storage, and parking for a wide variety of maritime uses.

Driving is the primary mode for travelers to Essex, but parking can be confusing. The primary roads into town are Route 133 from the Northwest and Southeast, Route 22 from the Southwest, and Southern Avenue from the South. No permanent fixed route transit serves Essex; however, a summer shuttle does provide limited weekend service to the nearby Commuter Rail station in Ipswich. Additional Commuter Rail service is available in Manchester-by-the-Sea, 5 miles to the south. Route 133, the Town's Main Street, is a MassDOT owned road. Shoulders on this road vary in width with no parking regulations, creating a confusing situation for visitors and enforcement officials alike. While much of the town's off-street parking is privately owned, business owners have relied on informal shared parking agreements to balance customer demand.

Recently, town officials have made strides to improve the built environment. This includes a town wide Essex Village Initiative in 2009 and a 5-year Strategic Plan in 2015. The Town also looked at how to improve the walking and landscape environment around Town Landing through a Town Landing improvement Plan in 2013, and it explored the feasibility of a Town boardwalk to increase public accessibility to the Essex River through a study in 2013.

In the context of additional local planning initiatives, the Town conducted this comprehensive parking study to unlock potential for local development, enhance visitor access, and better accommodate the parking needs of both visitors and residents. An effective parking management plan can maximize existing Town resources and provide important data to support future initiatives. In addition, it gives local residents and business owners a forum to express concerns and solutions for improving access and mobility town-wide. The study is multimodal in nature and examines issues not only related to vehicle parking management, but possibilities to improve access for pedestrians, bicyclists, and potential transit connections.







Existing Conditions

Existing Conditions

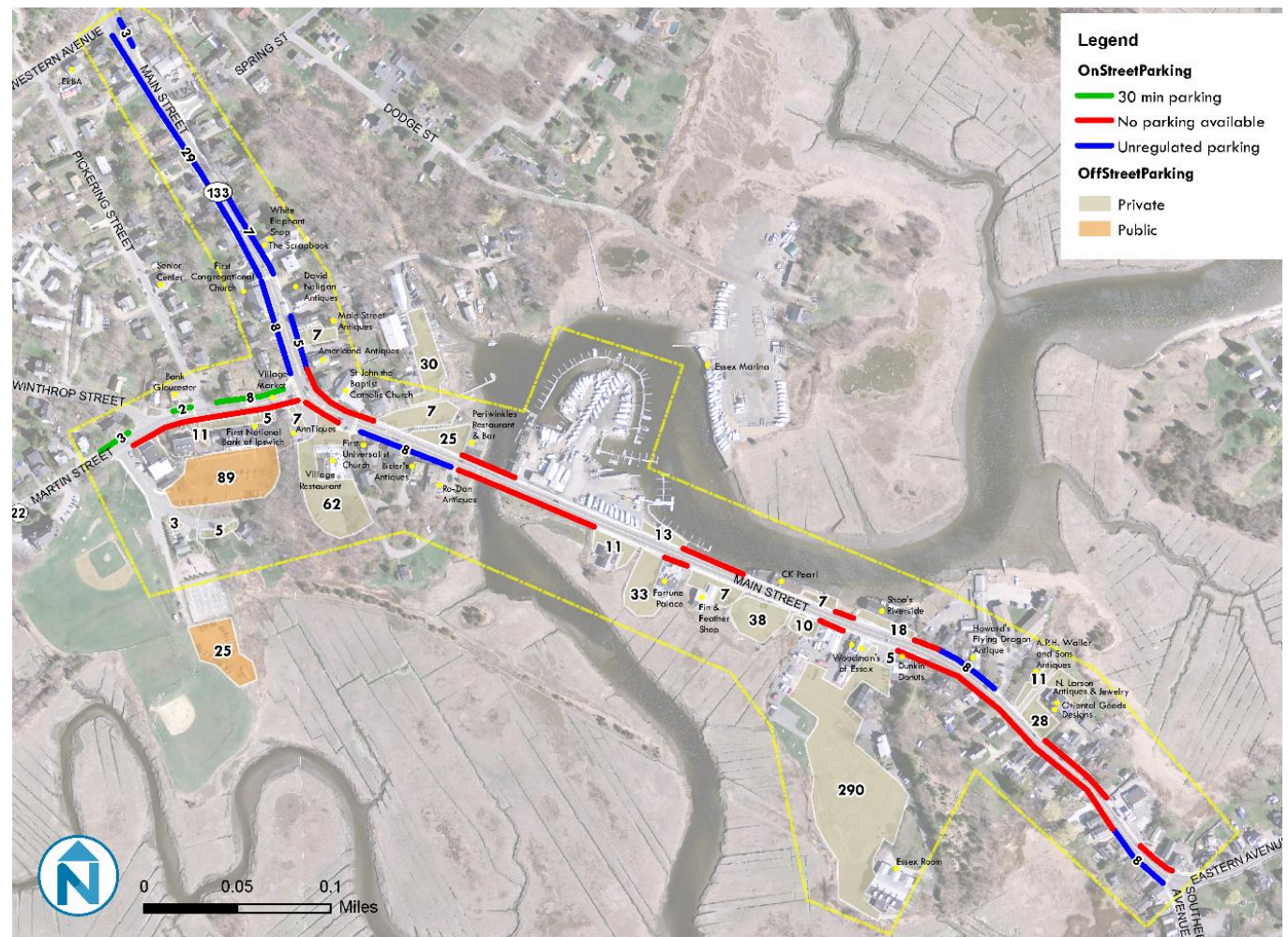
This section documents the existing parking conditions in Essex Center. Data collection efforts in the Summer of 2016 identified existing parking assets, their regulation, how they are used today, and the Town's current parking management strategies.

STUDY AREA

In order to effectively measure parking usage across the town center, a study area was identified that includes a portion of Main Street from Western Avenue to Southern Avenue and part of Martin Street from Main Street to Shepard Drive. The defined study area also includes the Town Landing and major local and regional attractions such as restaurants and antique stores.

The study area encompasses many private lots serving local businesses, along with one municipal lot west of the Town Center. Most businesses rely on the limited on-street parking or their own parking lot, but informal agreements exist to share parking between businesses to support those with limited on-site parking supply. On-street parking exists in places along Martin Street (State Route 22) and Main Street (State Route 133), but it is mostly unmarked within a wide shoulder with unclear regulations.

Figure 1: Essex Center Study Area & Parking Inventory



Note: Detailed inventory map in the Appendix.

Existing Conditions

PARKING INVENTORY

Based on a field inventory conducted in June 2016, there are approximately 840 public and private parking spaces in the Essex Town Center study area. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of the parking supply—approximately 75%—is privately owned and is restricted to designated users, such as customers or employees. Nearly 300 spaces, or about 35% of the total supply in the Town Center, are in the privately-owned Woodman’s lot. The owner informally allows other patrons to park there without penalty. On-street parking supply is very limited, and the regulation and legality of certain spaces is unclear.

The full parking inventory is depicted in the parking regulations map in Figure 1. Other key findings from the inventory are shown below.

Parking Inventory Key Findings




- There are approximately 840 existing parking spaces in the study area, but only 11% are on-street.
- Out of the 90 on-street parking spaces, most are unregulated and unmarked; a few spaces along Martin Street have 30-minute limits.
- The only publicly-owned parking is west of the Town Center, off of Martin Street, behind the Fire Station.
- A majority (84%) of the 750 off-street parking spaces are privately-owned and restricted to specific user groups.

Figure 2: Parking Inventory in Essex Center

Parking Location	# of Spaces	Percentage	% Publicly Available	% Restricted Access
On-Street	89	11%	100%	0%
Off-Street	747 (Public: 117 Private: 630)	89%	16%	84%
Total	836	100%		

Parking Regulation

OnStreetParking

-  30 min parking
-  No parking available
-  Unregulated parking

OffStreetParking

-  Private
-  Public

Existing Conditions

PARKING UTILIZATION

Parking occupancy counts provide a time series of typical parking demand at different times of day in an area. To gather this data, the team counted parked cars in each on-street segment and every off-street facility at pre-determined time intervals. By compiling parking utilization spatially, one can begin to clearly identify patterns of high or low usage, see the impact of regulations, and assess how much of the parking supply is actually utilized throughout a typical day. Land usage, regulations, pricing, and signage can drastically impact how even adjoining parking assets are utilized.

In order to ensure that parking management systems are operating efficiently, a certain level of vacancy and utilization is preferred both on-and off-street. It is ideal to have at least one empty on-street space per block face in a downtown, ensuring easy customer access to businesses. This typically equates to about 1 out of 8 spaces free, or a target of 15-percent vacant per block face. Similarly a goal of at least 10-percent vacancy is considered ideal in off-street lots. If any facility has less availability, it is effectively at its functional capacity and drivers perceive parking problems. Facilities with lower utilization have excess capacity.

The study team conducted parking occupancy counts on a typical weekend in the summer to capture the peak seasonal demand of the year. Utilization counts were conducted on a sunny Saturday in mid-July from 12pm until 8pm (from lunchtime to dinner time peak) to understand parking demand associated with Essex Center's peak activities.

Spatial Analysis of Parking Utilization: General Analysis

A chart of hourly utilization rates for one specific location is valuable, but seeing how that location behaves among others located nearby can reveal patterns and trends not evident in numbers alone. The lot which is completely full may be right around the corner from another lot that has plenty of availability at the same time.

Using the occupancy data, the study team developed a series of maps showing the utilization of each facility over time. Color represents the percentage of spaces utilized at each location based on notable breaks used to evaluate the adequacy of a parking facility:

- **Light Blue, Blue, and Yellow** represent 0-80% utilization, a point at which street faces and off-street facilities are viewed as underutilized. Any resource that consistently performs at this level, especially during peak-demand periods, can be viewed as having excess capacity.
- **Orange** signifies blocks and facilities with 81% to 90% utilization, and represents actively-used resources. Particularly for off-street facilities, the nearer utilization levels approach the high end of this range, the more efficiently they are being utilized.
- **Red** denotes utilization above 90% and is considered to be functionally full. These blocks and facilities appear full to motorists and consequently give the impression of an overall lack of parking.

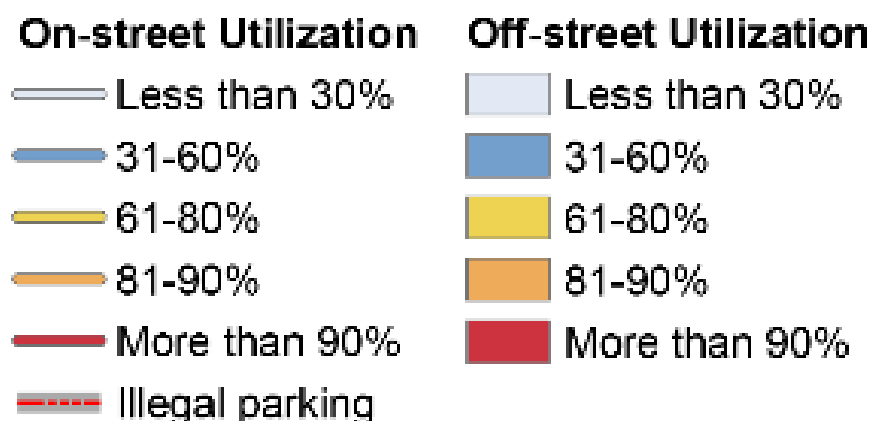
Existing Conditions

PARKING UTILIZATION

Parking utilization counts were conducted on a typical summer Saturday between 12:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Data collectors captured parking demand for 8 hours with counts every two hours in the study area. On the right are the key findings for Saturday parking utilization, followed by the spatial analysis maps on the next page which show the spatial patterns of parking utilization in two key periods: from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. and from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

These hours were chosen to capture customer, retail, and residential activity within Essex Center in peak summer beach and dining hours. Additional data collection was conducted by town staff on weekday evenings to validate the utilization patterns, which remained similar with only lower intensity.

Figure 3: Parking Utilization Color Shades



Note: "Illegal parking" indicates cars parked on-street in areas where parking is not allowed by sign, or street marking.

Parking Utilization Key Findings

- Overall, Essex Center has a peak parking utilization of 66% which occurs from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Maximum observed demand is 550 parked cars in the study area.
- On-street parking is 53% full at its peak time between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
- Off-street parking peaks at 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with a peak demand of 71% full, leaving approximately 220 spaces empty.
- Private lots are more heavily used than the municipal lot throughout the day.
 - The municipal (paved) lot is most utilized between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., with a peak demand of 53%.*
 - Private lots are over 60% full after 2:00 p.m. and reach a peak demand of 78% in the evening after 6:00 p.m. Among them, Woodman's 290-space lot is 83% full in the evening, and the Village Restaurant's parking lot also gets full at dinner time.
- Including both on- and off-street parking, out of all publicly-available supply, 52% is full at peak, leaving almost 100 empty spaces.

* Note: Trucks towing trailers were counted as two cars due to their occupancy of two normal parking spaces.

Figure 4: Essex Center Parking Utilization – Saturday July 16th 12pm-2pm

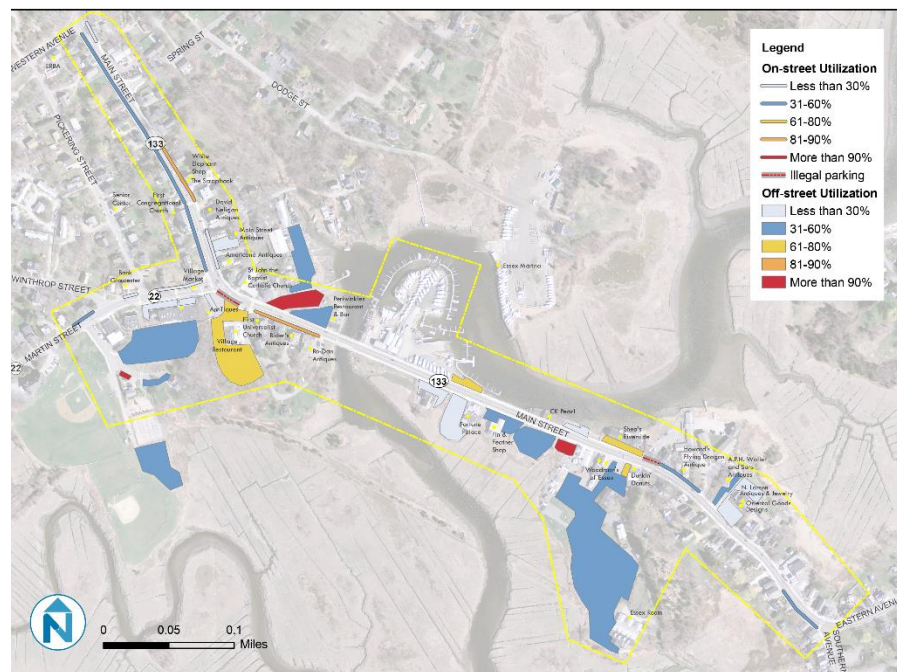


Figure 5: Essex Center Parking Utilization – Saturday July 16th 2pm-4pm

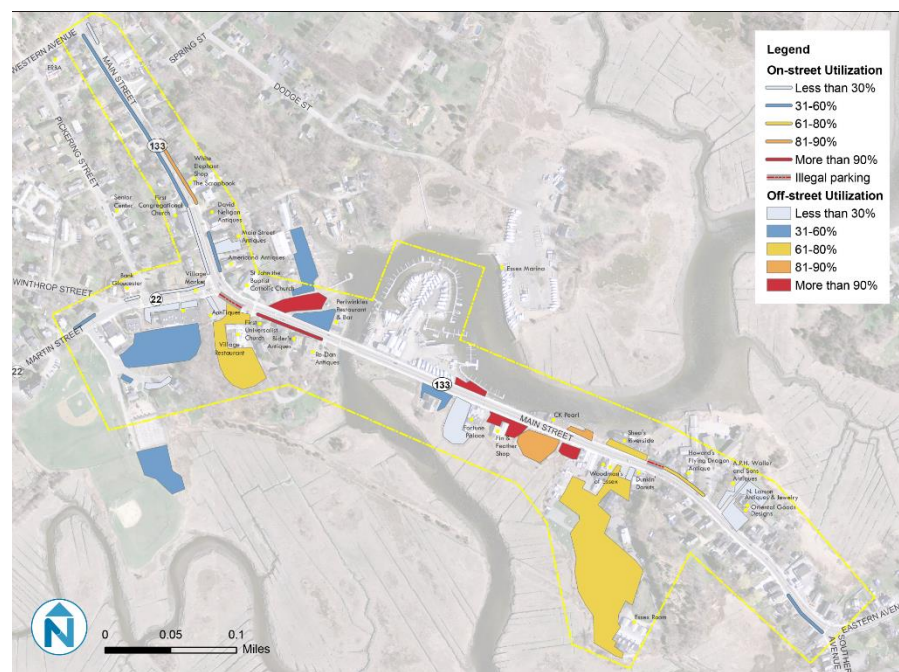


Figure 6: Essex Center Parking Utilization – Saturday July 16th 4pm-6pm

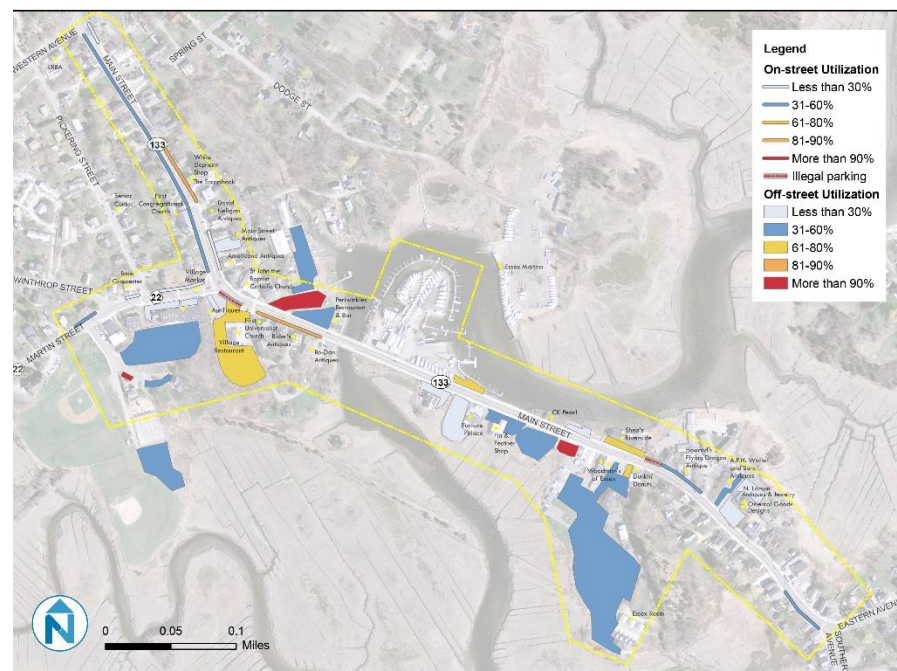
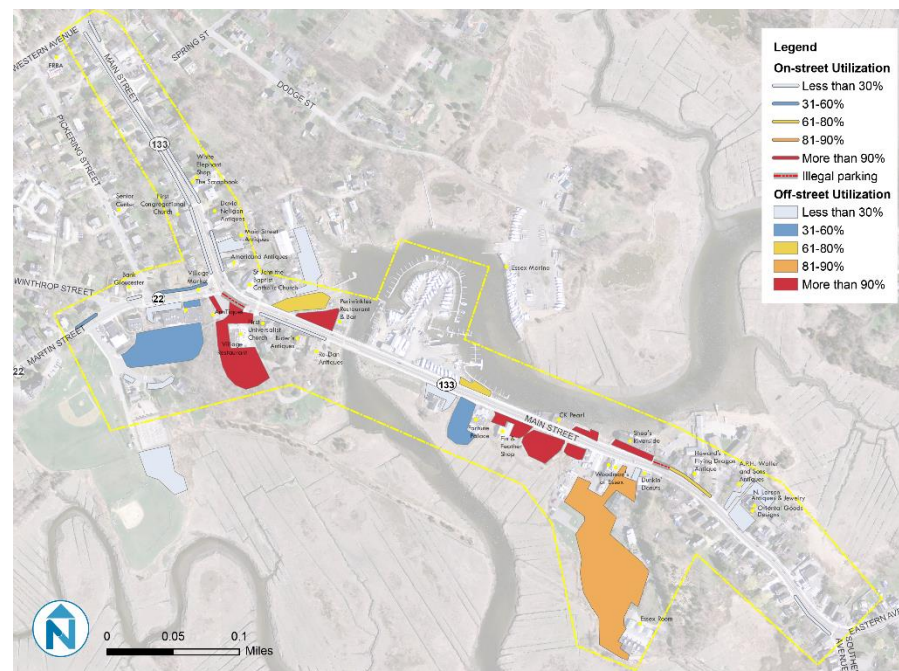


Figure 7: Essex Center Parking Utilization – Saturday July 16th 6pm-8pm



Note: Detailed utilization maps in the Appendix.

Existing Conditions

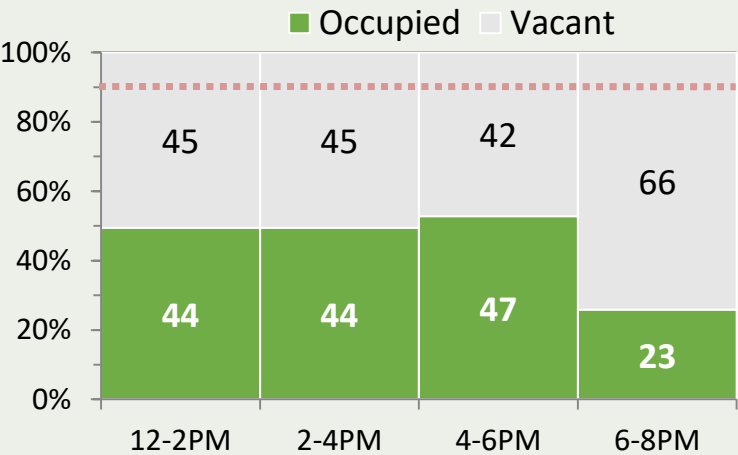
PARKING UTILIZATION

The utilization charts show a detailed picture of parking occupancy and vacancy. The green bars indicate how many cars are parked in each time period; the grey areas indicate the number of available parking spaces. Based on the detailed data collection effort, the utilization data can be analyzed in multiple ways, such as by regulation, location, or type of parking. This analysis reveals that parking demand is not uniform throughout the study area.

Overall, Essex Center’s parking supply is under 70% utilized, indicating an adequate availability throughout the day. Off-street private lots are proportionately more utilized than on-street and municipal lots.

Figure 9: Utilization Profile: On-Street Parking

Saturday Utilization



Note: The red dotted line indicates the 90-percent optimal occupancy

Figure 8: Utilization Profile: All Parking Within The Study Area

Saturday Utilization

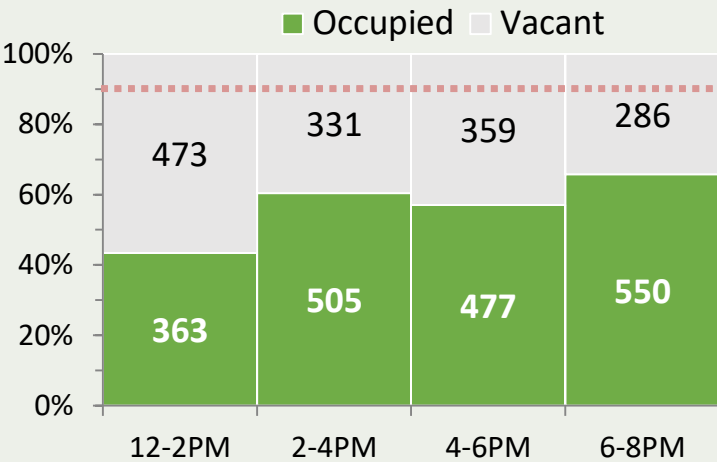
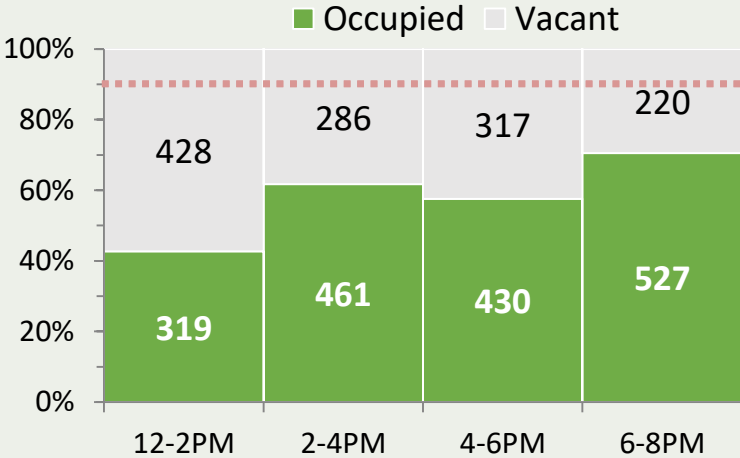


Figure 10: Utilization Profile: Off-Street Parking

Saturday Utilization



Existing Conditions

Figure 11: Utilization Profile: All Publicly-Available Parking (On- & Off-street)

Saturday Utilization

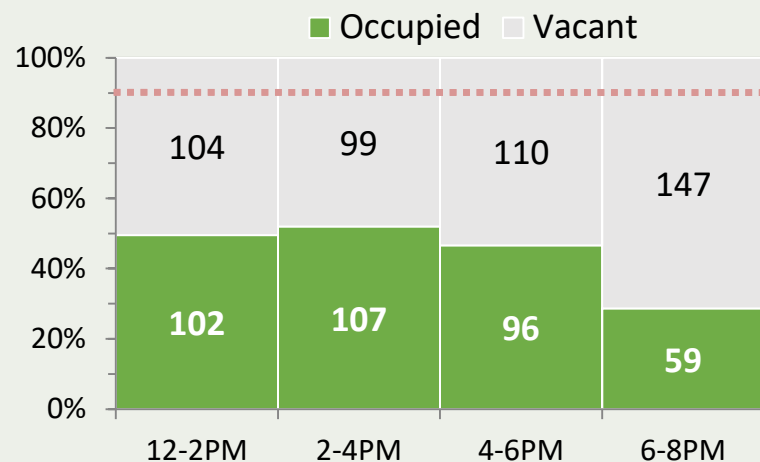


Figure 12: Utilization Profile: Off-street Private Lots

Saturday Utilization

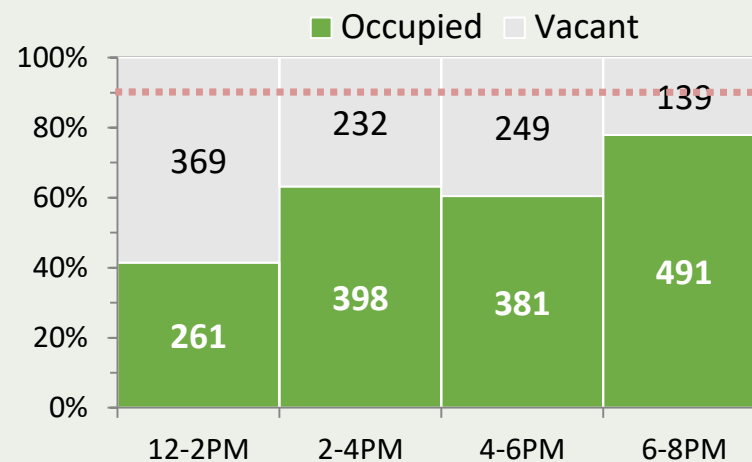


Figure 13: Utilization Profile: Town Center Municipal Lot (paved)

Saturday Utilization

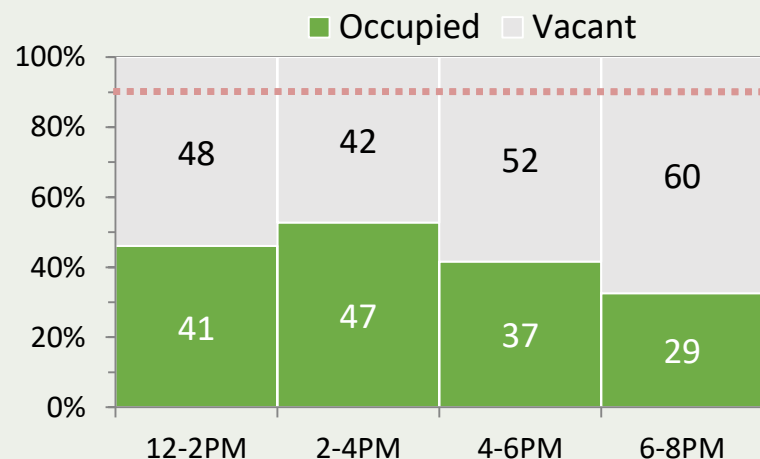
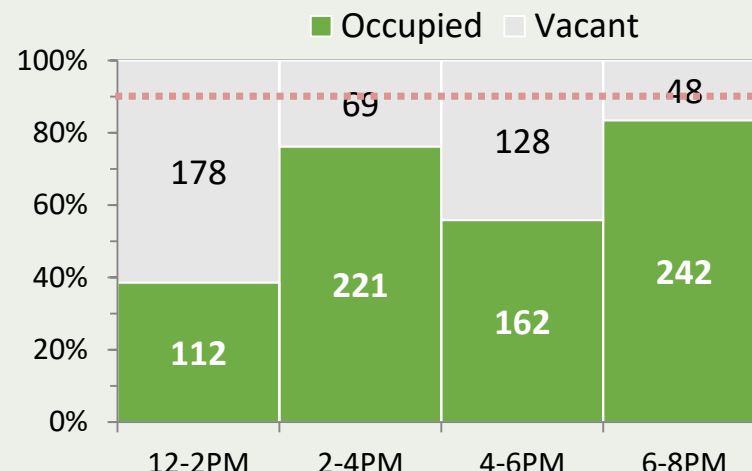


Figure 14: Utilization Profile: Woodman's Lot

Saturday Utilization



Note: The red dotted line indicates the 90-percent optimal occupancy



Public Process



Public Process

The public outreach process is an integral piece of the parking analysis, as it can help unlock another level of understanding of how parking is used or not used and the reasons why. In addition to parking data collection, the study team conducted a series of stakeholder meetings, facilitated a public open house in June 2016, and launched an online parking user survey between May and July in 2016—all done in order to understand and represent the community perspective of parking in Essex Center.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

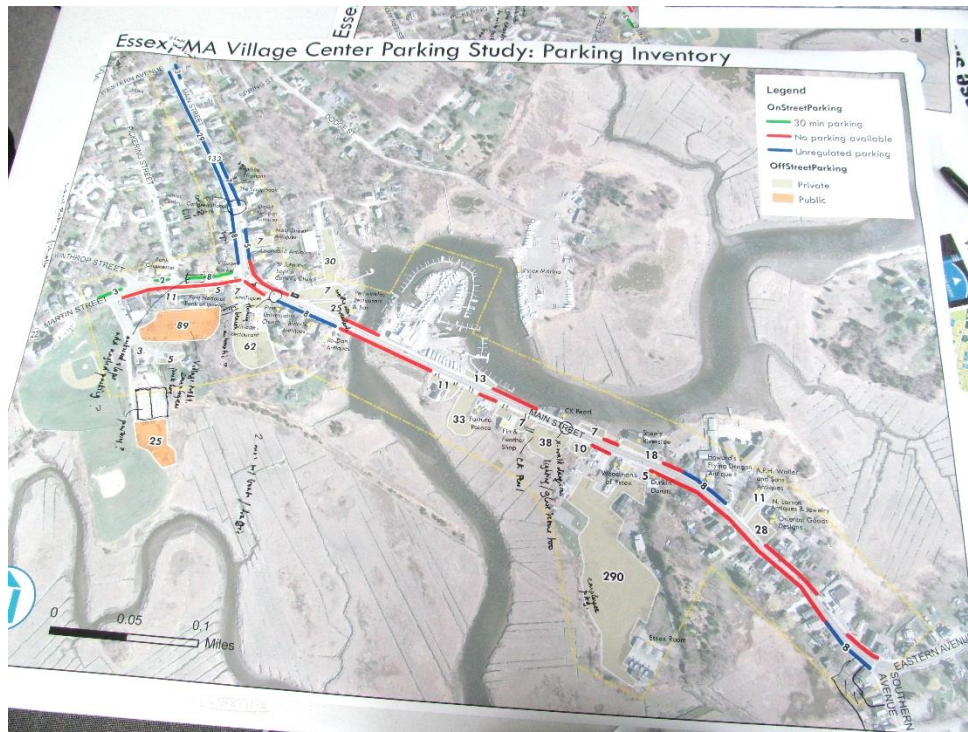
A series of targeted stakeholder interviews were conducted at the early stage of the public outreach process to gather input from those most familiar with parking issues and challenges in Essex Center. Town staff identified and invited stakeholders including business owners, developers, institutions, parking administration staff, and Town planning staff. The primary goal of these small-group meetings was a free flowing exchange about parking and an understanding of specific parking experiences and perspectives in Essex Center. Several common themes emerged, which are summarized at right.

Interviewed Stakeholders

- Steering Committee
- Westley Burnham
- Susan Coviello
- Brendhan Zubricki
- Peter Silva
- Robert Coviello
- Property owners/merchants
- Town parking staff
- Town planner, policy and administration staff
- Key institutions
- Paul Goodwin
- Matt Coogan
- Kim Drake
- Lisa O'Donnell

Stakeholder Interview Summary

- Conflict exists between employee and customer parking.
- Summer weekends are the busiest time for parking.
- Existing parking spaces should be formalized and regulated by striping and enforcement, e.g. on-street and the unpaved municipal lot behind Town Tennis Court.
- Striping and formalizing on-street parking requires coordination between the Town and the State.
- Shared parking among private owners exists and should be encouraged.
- Trailer parking poses challenges in the municipal lot.
- Directional and parking signage is generally needed.
- A more walkable and bikable downtown is desired. Crossing Main Street can be quite challenging with speeding through-traffic, poor visibility at turning corners, and improperly-placed crosswalks. Bicycle parking and infrastructure is needed.
- Residents complain of others parking on their street.
- Short-term loading zones are needed for antique stores.
- Valet parking for stores and restaurants at peak time may help relieve parking pressure.

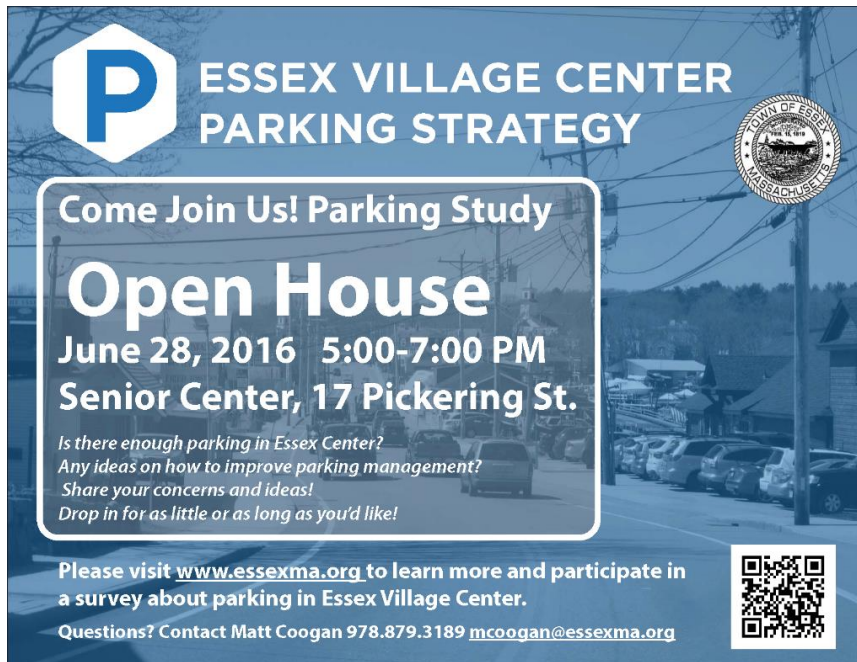


Public Process

OPEN HOUSE

On June 28th 2016, local residents, business owners, employees and others were invited to Essex Senior Center to participate in a hands-on parking “Open House” designed to gather input on parking in Essex Center. The Open House included a brief presentation of the study background and initial findings through field observation and online survey. A majority of the meeting time was used to gather feedback from the public through a number of interactive activities and an open comments period for participants to express their concerns directly to the study team. More than a dozen public participants showed up and voiced their comments and concerns.

Figure 15: Open House Flyer (June 2016)

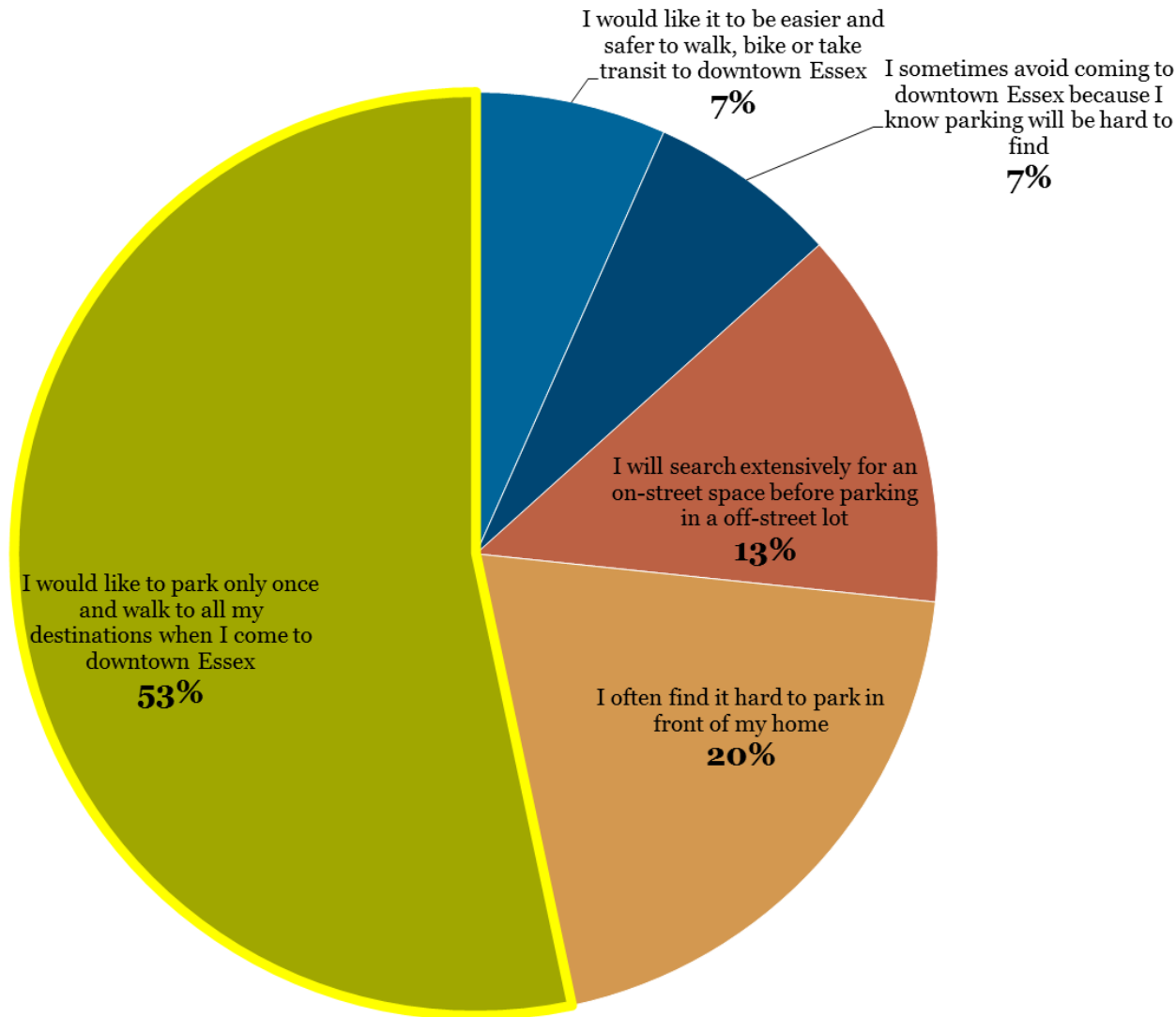


Open House Key Findings

- Participants prefer to park once and walk to all their destinations in downtown Essex.
- Participants also expressed that it was sometimes difficult to park in front of their own home and stated a preference for on-street parking versus off-street parking
- Many pointed out hazardous locations in Essex Center for pedestrians crossing the streets.
- Many stated that they find the current configuration of on- and off-street parking confusing, and believed that better signage, markings and information was needed.
- Generally, participants agreed that long-term parking should be placed further from the town center and that high parking turnover in the town center was important to increase business.
- Shoulder parking along Main Street is confusing in terms of legality and regulation.
- Traffic speeding, truck and through traffic has created an unsafe and unpleasant walking environment along Main Street.
- Participants suggest clearer regulation on resident and non-resident parking with trailers.

Public Process

Figure 16: Parking Priority Exercise Results



Parking Priorities Voting Exercise

Open house participants were invited to “vote” for the parking-related priorities that were of greatest concern to them. With five potential priorities, participants were allotted three “votes” that could be used to prioritize one of more issues.

The exercise revealed a local desire (53%) for a more walkable downtown in a “park-once” zone. This response indicates that there are types of infrastructure that could be improved to encourage walking. The second most votes (20%) were received for “find it hard to park in front of my home,” indicating a problem with parking along residential streets

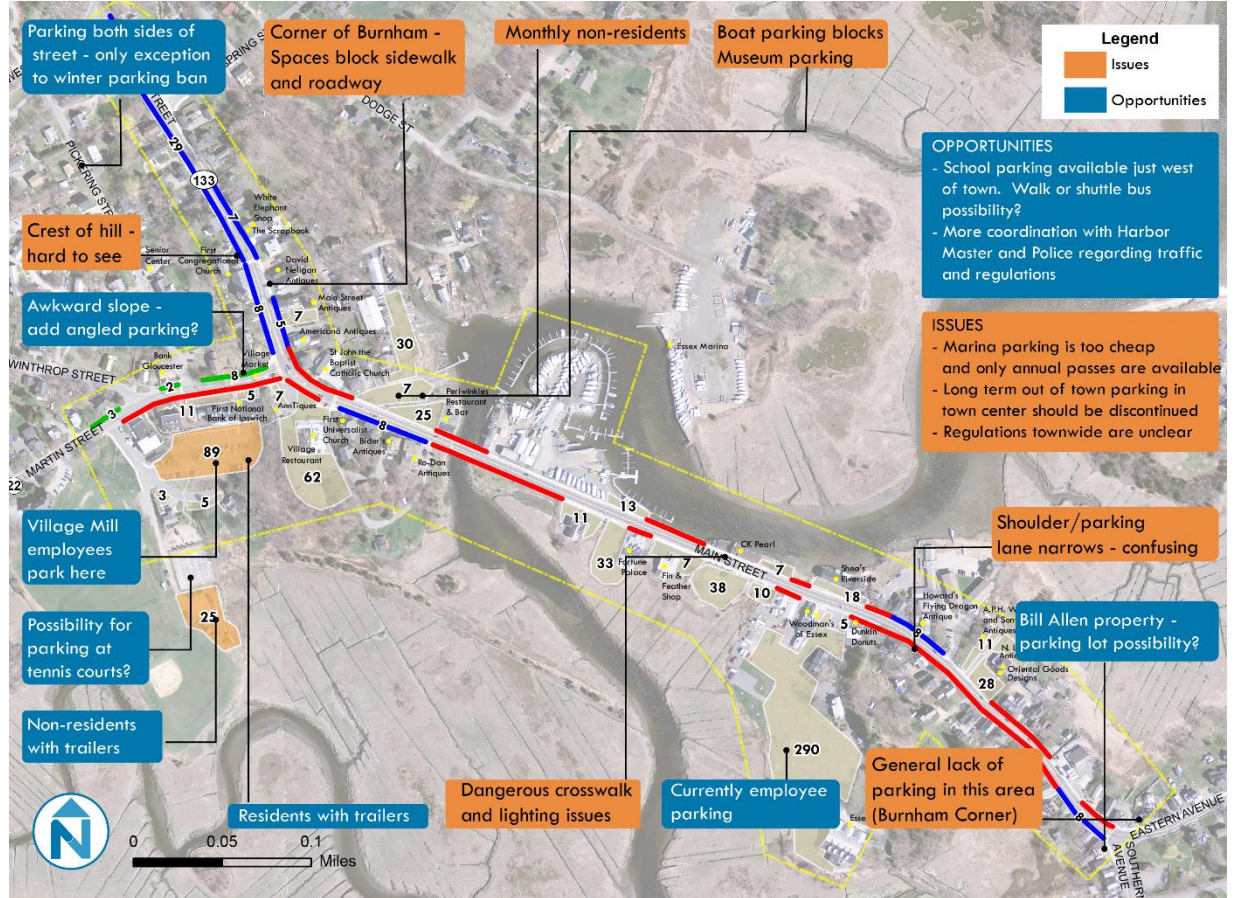
Public Process

OPEN HOUSE

Mapping Exercise

Participants expressed directly to the study team their comments on issues and opportunities regarding parking in Essex Center. Location-specific comments were marked directly onto a large printed map of the study area, while non-location-specific comments were listed separately. All comments were compiled into the electronic version in Figure 17. Possible solutions were marked as opportunities, while comments without a clear or immediate solution were marked as issues.

Figure 17: Open House Mapping Exercise Comments



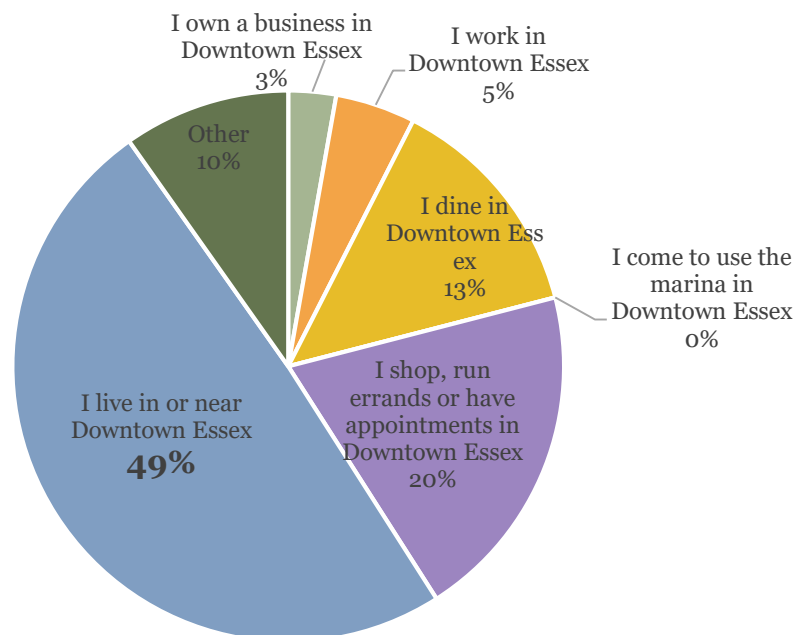
Public Process

ONLINE SURVEY

This section summarizes findings from the online parking user survey, which incorporated input from parkers regarding their parking preference, habits, experiences, and perceptions. Respondents reported about their most recent day in Essex Center along with more generalized perceptions. The online survey was launched on May 2nd 2016 and was widely distributed and publicized on Town website and through local media. By July 15th 2016 when the survey was closed, it had attracted over 200 responses.

Figure 18: Respondents by User Group

What was your PRIMARY purpose in coming to Downtown Essex today?



Online Survey Key Findings

- 49% of the total 216 survey respondents are downtown residents; 33% are downtown customers; 8% are downtown employers or employees, and; 10% identified as other user groups.
- Most survey respondents are frequent visitors to Essex Center – 43% visit downtown every day, 40% several times a week.
- Most respondents park on Martin Street/Route 22 (37%) or a private parking lot (38%).
- Most respondents are short-term parkers – 39% park less than 30 minutes, 17% within 1 hour.
- A majority of respondents (approximately 90%) can find a parking spot within 5 minutes on the day they filled in the survey or on an average day; and even on the worst day, still over half (56%) can find parking within 5 minutes.
- One third of the respondents at least once failed to find parking and left.
- A significant majority (96%) of survey respondents are not willing to pay to get a guaranteed parking space.
- On the question of what would enhance the transportation and parking experience in Essex Center, most think “info and signing about parking options in the area” would help parkers navigate; and “better walking conditions,” and “more bicycling infrastructure/parking” are desired.

Public Process

ONLINE SURVEY

Figure 19: Most Survey Respondents are Frequent Visitors

How often do you come to
Downtown Essex?

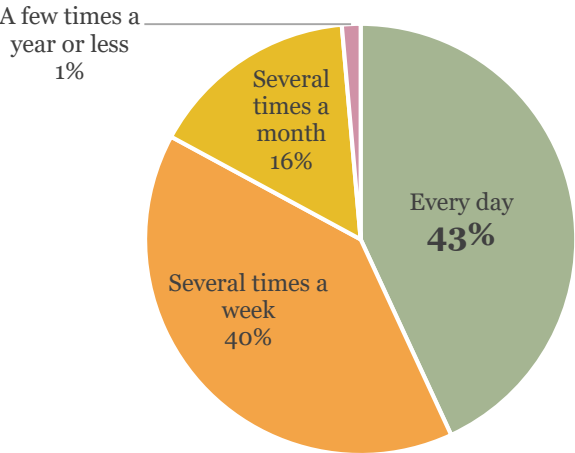


Figure 20: Most Survey Respondents are Short-Term Parkers

How long do you typically park in Downtown
Essex?

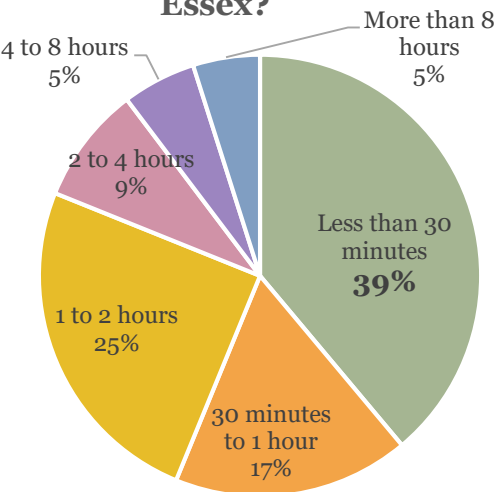
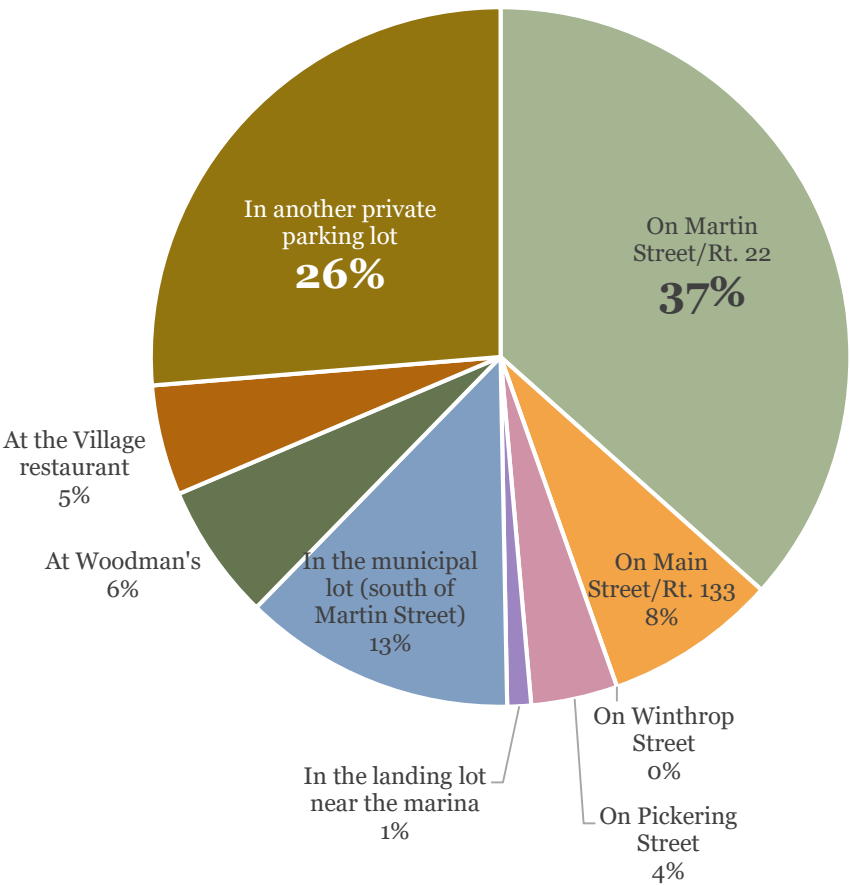


Figure 21: Most Respondents Park on Martin Street or in a Private Lot

Today, or the most recent day you drove to Essex,
where did you park?



Public Process

ONLINE SURVEY

Figure 22: Some Who Can't Find Parking Will Leave
Have you ever failed to find parking and just left?

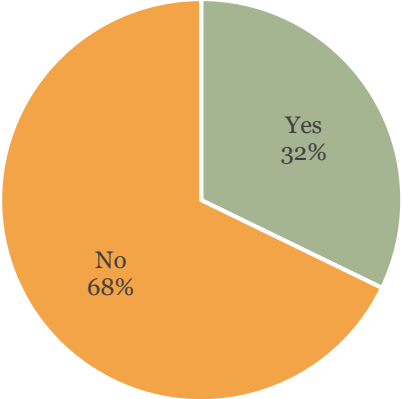


Figure 23: Little Desire to Pay for Parking
Would you be willing to pay to get a guaranteed parking space in downtown?

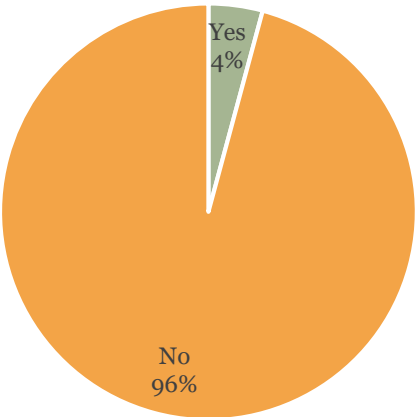
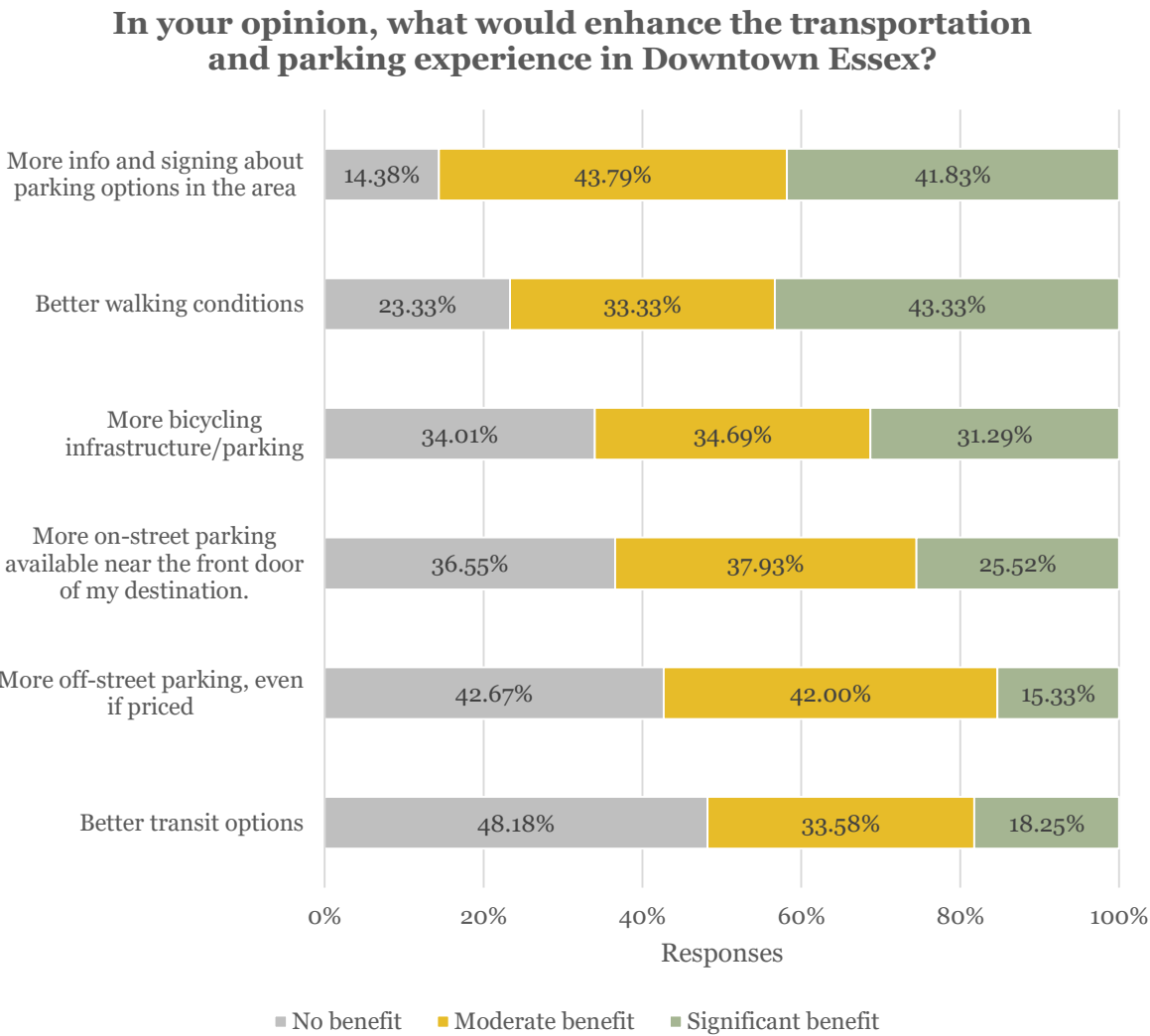


Figure 24: Preference of Transportation and Parking Improvement







Recommendations



Recommendations

The study has identified that Essex Center's parking system currently meets the needs of its diverse retail, commercial and recreational uses, as well as day-to-day resident, employee, and visitor needs. A majority of parking remains underutilized throughout the course of the day, except that several retail stores and restaurants who have smaller lots on-site get busy during peak dining hours in the summer.

The main challenges for Essex Center are its limited on-street parking resources and a challenging walking environment for accessing many remote parking resources. A comprehensive parking study is an opportune time for the Town to improve its current parking management system to help support downtown businesses and future mixed-use development.

The following recommendations are intended to serve as guidance for the implementation of changes to Essex Center's parking management system. These recommendations reflect the conclusions of the study team, observations of the downtown environment, review and analysis of various Town data, and most importantly, input from the participants of the public open house. These suggestions are also informed by parking management best practice as evidenced in a number of similar communities across America that recognize one important point: poorly managed parking spaces constrain economic opportunity for local merchants and business owners, while good parking management supports thriving downtowns. Full implementation of these recommendations will not be possible without continued Town and private business/landowner coordination and conversation as each has a common interest and commitment to improving parking in Essex Center.



Recommendations

Maximize Existing Parking Resources

- Formalize on-street parking
- Increase efficiency of public off-street parking
- Use time-limits and clear signage to regulate parking

Support Downtown Business Through Sharing

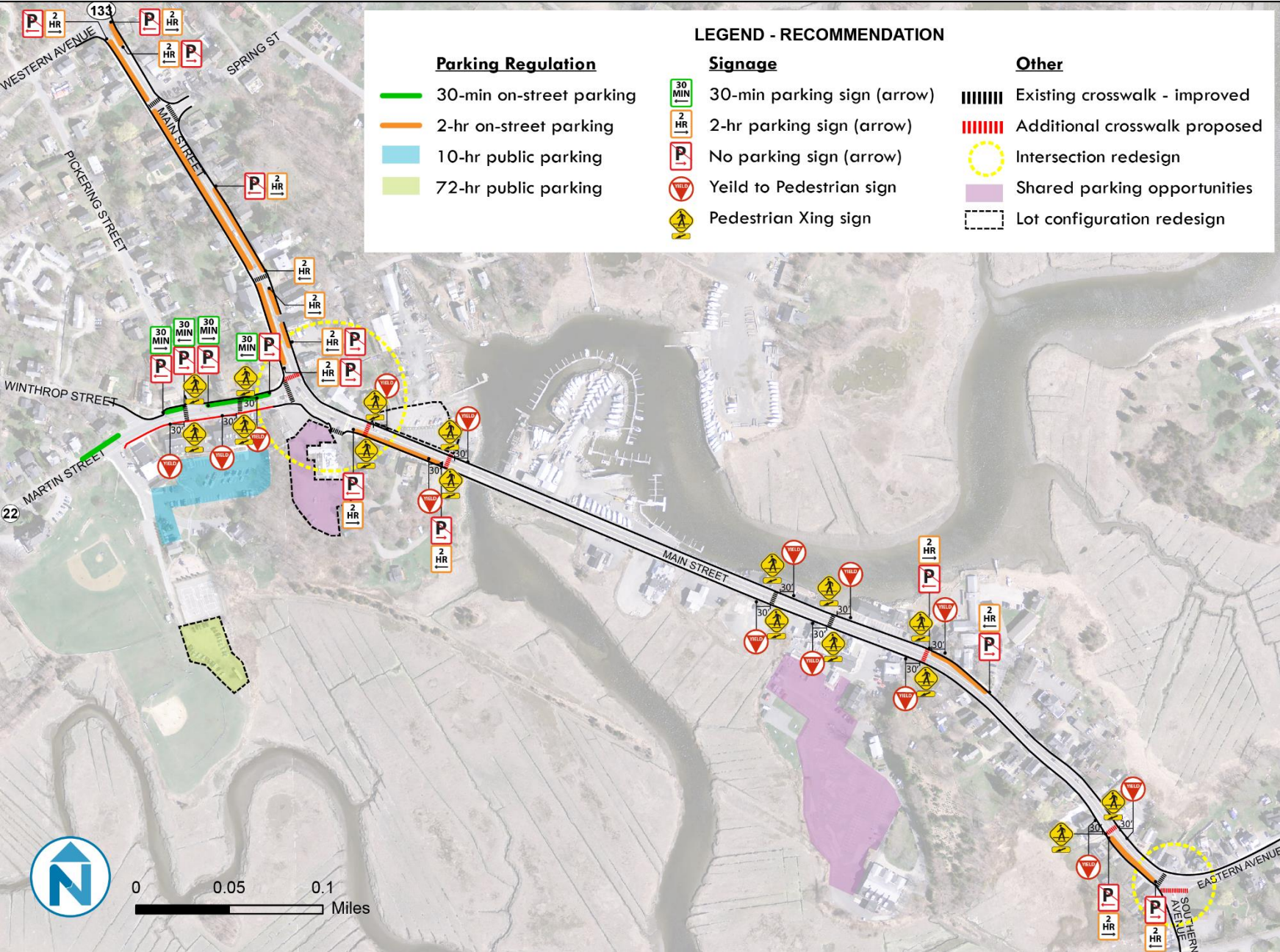
- Initiate public and private shared parking agreements
- Encourage shared parking between businesses
- Explore opportunities of valet parking and loading

Enhance Downtown Experience

- Provide better parking information and signage
- Strategically locate crosswalks and improve safety
- Install missing sidewalks and minimize driveway cuts
- Improve event parking management during summer

Recommendations

Figure 25: Recommendations Overview



1. Maximize Existing Parking Resources

1A. Formalize On-Street Parking

On-street parking is essential for local businesses, allowing customers to park immediately outside their destination for quick visits up to a couple hours. The provision of on-street parking also offers drivers more options and greater flexibility than with off-street parking alone. However, in Essex, on-street spaces needs to be clearly marked and have understandable regulatory signage.

On-street parking should be formalized in Essex Center to improve parking options along Main Street, where there is little available parking, particularly east of Martin Street. Parking along Main Street should be managed using customer-friendly time-limits (such as 2-hours) that encourage long-term parkers to go off-street. Existing 30-minute time-limits should be maintained for the on-street parking across from the Post Office. These regulations should be clearly marked with consistent signage.

For Essex Center, the ideal on-street parking space design is like the north side spaces just east of Woodman's of Essex, which provide sufficient room for parked vehicles while not impeding the flow of vehicles. Vehicle parking on the south side of Main Street west of Southern Avenue should be improved similarly by adding additional spaces and using a tapered curb extension that maintains a 30' two-way street with shoulders, until the curb to curb distance widens to 35' above which on-street parking can comfortably occur.

Similar provisions can be made on Main Street just west of the river bridge, where there is little protection for south side parking, and also on Main Street west of Martin Street. Formalizing parking and "No Parking" regulations in this area will help discourage drivers from parking in areas where sightlines are compromised—such as just east of Burnham Court—while encouraging business access where it is not in conflict with through traffic.*

* Note: MassDOT has not formally allowed parking on Route 133.



1. Maximize Existing Parking Resources

1B. Increase Efficiency of Public Off-Street Parking

In addition to formalized on-street parking, off-street parking in Essex Center must be improved and made to operate more efficiently in order to provide better parking opportunities for all visitors to the area.

To begin, the parking lot behind the tennis courts and next to the Memorial Field baseball diamonds should have some minimal design treatments using natural materials—such as landscaping, stones, or timbers—to clearly designate rows that vehicles should park in, increasing convenience while maximizing the potential capacity of the lot. Complimented by clear wayfinding and regulatory signing, this lot could become the long-term parking area for Essex Center, with up to 72-hours of storage for boat-trailer parking. While boaters would need to walk another minute or two further to the Town's boat landing, improvements to the pedestrian path could be constructed in order to facilitate the walking trip.

The existing stairs to the municipal lot behind the Post Office terminate in the Village Restaurant's parking, making this connection very unfriendly. Basic signing, markings, and lighting improvements would increase the utility of the municipal lots—and improvements could work to enhance the customer experience at the Village Restaurant as well, as suggested in later recommendations.

In addition to the improvements described above, the Town should update the regulations of the paved municipal lot. Time-limits should be formally signed to allow a vehicle to remain for up to 10 hours, with longer parking allowed only in the unpaved lot.



1. Maximize Existing Parking Resources

1C. Use Time-Limits and Clear Signage to Regulate Parking

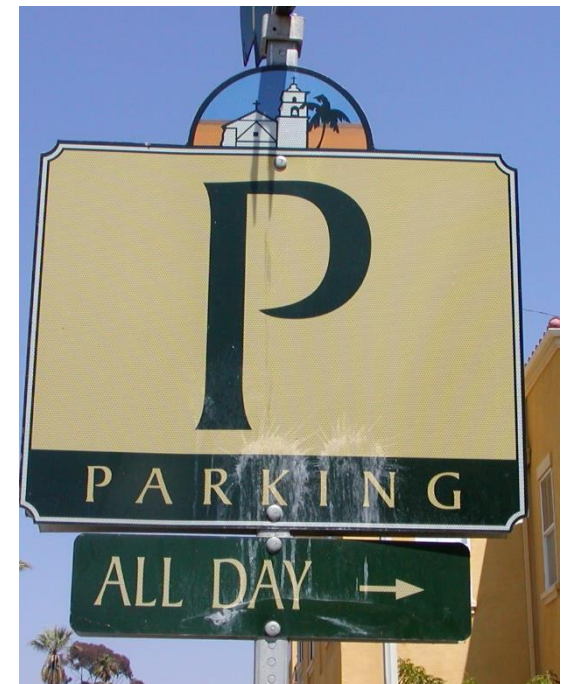
Signage and parking regulations are crucial elements of parking management. Having clear guidance for patrons who are unfamiliar with the area is an important component of the customer experience. Highlighting existing on- and off-street spaces will improve visibility for motorists seeking parking. Overall, signage should work to eliminate confusion and ensure that all users understand the rules and locations of parking.

Existing parking wayfinding signage for drivers in Essex Center is scarce and sometimes hard to find. Parking signage in both public and private lots is often hard to distinguish and may not be clear to visitors where they are allowed to park and for how long. Meanwhile, there are no pedestrian-scale signs at all to direct visitors to and from their parking space.

The Town should create a robust vehicular and pedestrian parking wayfinding system to identify parking resources and key destinations in the area. Signs could be attractively branded and offered to private owners whose lots are regularly open to public customers—especially where regular sharing is in effect.

Parking signage should clearly indicate where the public is welcome and lay out any time-limits. The Town should implement simple regulations with clear signage to show where there is 30-minute, 2-hour, 10-hour, or 72-hour time-limits.

Wayfinding signage should clearly inform drivers as to where they can find off-street parking areas, both short-term and long-term.



2. Support Downtown Business through Sharing

2A. Initiate Public-Private Shared Parking District

In order to expand the availability of public parking and balance the underutilization of private parking in Essex Center, the Town can create a shared parking district. Within the shared parking district, a separate set of parking standards would be created. These zoning changes would not require new developments to build as many parking spaces as previously required, and existing properties could safely bank their existing space count for future redevelopment before agreeing to open their spaces to other users. Further these changes would allow and encourage land owners and businesses to cooperate in order to provide sufficient parking at peak hours for the public. It is also recommended that Essex:

- Encourage the sharing of parking facilities between public and private parking areas;
- Lease private parking for sharing, with the Town either directly leasing spaces or acting as agent between two private entities and offering maintenance services; and
- Utilize existing supply before investing in more parking

The Town should work to clarify with markings and signs the allowed egress across the Village Restaurant's parking lot to the stairs down to the public lot (which could one day be opened in the winter if an accessible switchback ramp were installed alongside). In exchange for improving this access to the municipal lot, the Town could offer to redesign and repave the Village's lot to increase circulation and parking as shown on the next page.

Further shared parking agreements could be made with places like Woodman's in exchange for Town improvements to parking lots, including upgraded landscaping, striping, lighting and signage.

2B. Encourage Shared Parking Between Businesses

The Town should push for more parking agreements between Essex Center businesses. Today, informal shared parking agreement already exists with Woodman's lot as they allow other business patrons to park at peak time.

The Town can facilitate these agreements between potential partners by supplying appropriate legal mechanisms and providing liability education. The Town also can support the continued sharing of parking in the event of a change of ownership or use.



2. Support Downtown Business through Sharing

Potential Village Restaurant Parking Lot Improvements

Existing



Proposed



A reconfiguration can improve circulation and safety while increasing supply.

2. Support Downtown Business through Sharing

2C. Explore Opportunities of Valet Parking and Loading

Within Essex Center, some antiques businesses do not have on-site parking, and they have suggested having a short-term loading zone on the street to help their customers load furniture. Meanwhile some of the restaurants do not have enough on-site parking, and there may be an opportunity to use valet parking with a combination of a shared parking agreement among businesses to improve parking in the area.

In order to accommodate customer parking, the Town can create a public valet program in order to better accommodate public parking demand. By linking just a few on-street spaces used for drop-off and pick-up to under-utilized off-street facilities, public valet can expand curbside parking resources in high-demand areas, at high-demand times, and make greater use of all area parking resources. For customers, these services offer an easy alternative to finding parking by allowing drivers to drop-off their car at a convenient location. Essentially, it combines the convenience of on-street parking with the expansive capacity of off-street facilities. Valets can operate on tips donated to charitable causes.

A public valet can also help facilitate shared parking arrangements, by limiting access to the shared facility to an identifiable service operated by a party that can assume responsibility for all risk. This can open up access to private parking lots that might otherwise remain significantly under-utilized or to lot owners that are resistant to providing more open access to their facilities.

Meanwhile, the Town can further improve on-street parking and parking demand in the area by creating time-limited loading zones in the area. These loading zones would be placed near the antique stores along Main Street and would help alleviate congestion along Main Street caused by double-parked vehicles that load or unload antiques.





3. Enhance Downtown Experience

3A. Provide Better Parking Information and Signage

Many visitors to Essex Center—particularly out-of-town visitors—are unaware of empty parking spaces located within the area and nearby their destination. Signage that guides motorists to on-and off-street parking deters drivers from excessive cruising and frustration. Parking and wayfinding signage that is easy-to-read and understand is a critical component to deciphering a downtown and its parking system.

A wayfinding program should encourage a “park once” or “park and walk” environment, focusing not just on getting cars into parking facilities but getting people to visit multiple destinations on foot without moving their cars. In addition to parking facilities, signage should identify key sites of interest and their approximate walking distance (in minutes), such as area businesses, the Town Landing, municipal buildings, and other points of interest.

Signage for parking and information should be a part of a comprehensive strategy to inform visitors before they arrive, at their arrival, and during their stay in Essex. Information should be available before a visitor’s trip to Essex through the Town’s website and other tourist outreach materials that demonstrate where on- and off-street parking is available. When a visitor arrives in Essex, signage should clearly point to parking and nearby destinations. Finally, during their stay, visitors should be able to easily navigate the area using signage that shows the way to destinations and back again to parking areas. Having free maps available to visitors in shops and other public places will further improve access to relevant information and may reveal new destinations to visitors.

The team recommends installing wayfinding signage to guide those new to Essex or those that only come once or twice a year. Using street names to rename and brand the municipal parking lots based on their location also can go a long way to making the system more accommodating.



3. Enhance Downtown Experience

3B. Strategically Locate Crosswalk and Improve Safety

Crosswalks are natural points of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians. While crosswalks are used by pedestrians, they are designed to warn drivers. Advanced signage, yield triangles or “sharks’ teeth,” and broad, reflective crosswalk bars are all designed not simply to direct the pedestrian but to inform the driver of possible conflicts and to prepare to yield to someone walking.

Essex’s crosswalks are often not designed with the best pedestrian-oriented designs in mind. Most Essex crosswalks use thin, diagonal zebra striping as seen on the following page. With the addition of horizontal lines that can be confused with stop bars, plus the short depth of the lines, the crosswalks are difficult to see from far enough in advance for motorists to be safely warned at prevailing speeds.

All crosswalks in Essex Center should conform to best practice; ideally 1-2’ thick “continental” ladder bars that run parallel to traffic. These bars should be a minimum of 16’ long, rather than the 8-10’ length that they are today. Appropriate crosswalk signs should be included, and advanced yield “shark’s teeth” should be installed 30’ before each crosswalk where a stop sign is not installed.

Further improvements can be made at intersections within the Essex Center area to improve safety for people who are walking. Potential improvements suggested on the following pages include: the intersection of Martin and Main Streets, the crossing at Willow Court, pedestrian upgrades at Southern Avenue and Main Street, and other improvements, including:

- New crosswalks on Main Street in the following places:
 - Immediately west of the river bridge, just east of the on-street parking
 - East of Woodman’s, terminating the north side on-street parking with a curb extension
 - Before the south side spaces at their protecting extension
- Improve the existing crosswalk west of Woodman’s



3. Enhance Downtown Experience

Intersection of Main Street and Martin Street - Before



3. Enhance Downtown Experience

Intersection of Main Street and Martin Street - After



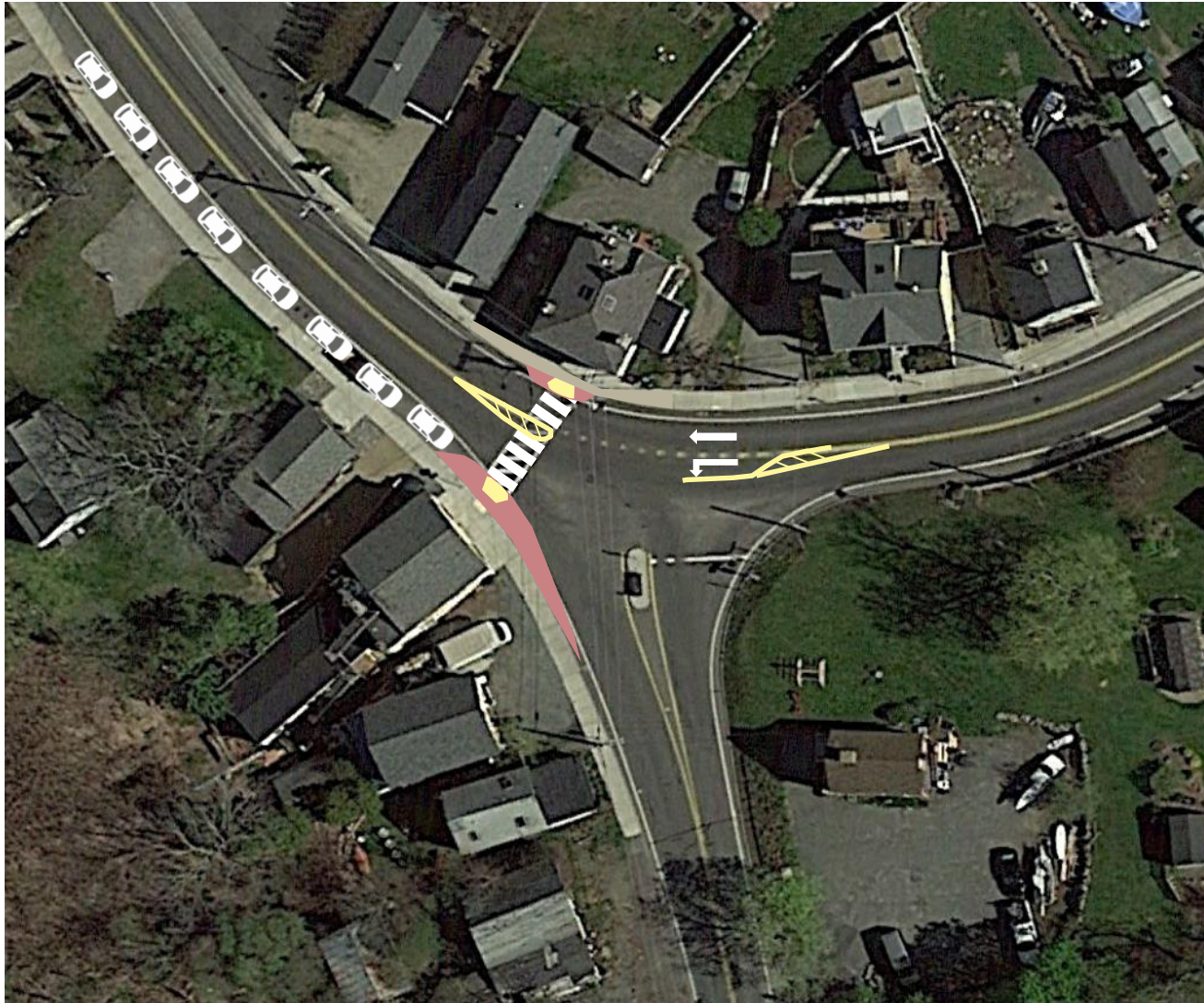
3. Enhance Downtown Experience

Intersection of Main Street and Southern Avenue - Before



3. Enhance Downtown Experience

Intersection of Main Street and Southern Avenue - After



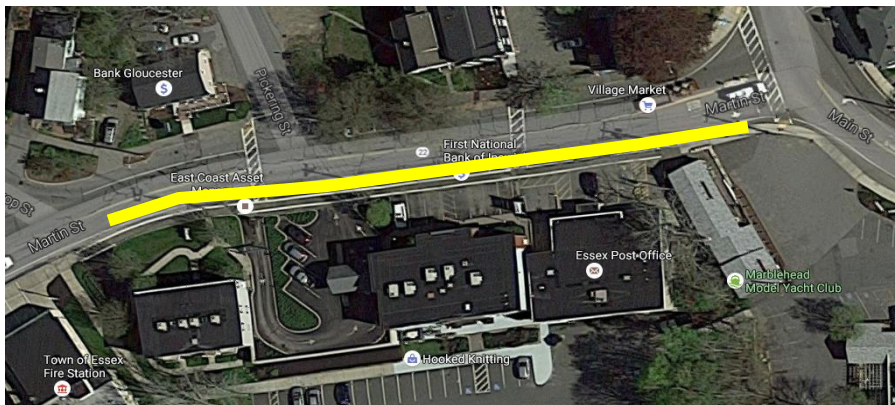
3. Enhance Downtown Experience

3C. Install Missing Sidewalk & Minimize Driveways

In order to provide a comprehensive parking improvement plan in Essex Center, attention must be paid to the walking experience to and from parking. Notable walkability issues in the area include a lack of sidewalks in key areas and frequent driveway curb cuts. Both of these issues limit walkability, increase conflict areas between vehicles and people walking, and lower the quality of the visitor experience.

As shown earlier, the Town should remove redundant curb cuts at the Town Landing, and combine the multiple curb cuts into one driveway for the businesses, boat ramp, and shipbuilding museum, rather than the three that exist there today.

A sidewalk should be installed on the southeast side at the end of Martin Street, as shown below. This sidewalk can additionally operate as a raised driveway lip in order to permit the continued use of existing head-in off-street parking along Martin Street, however curb extensions should be added for the two crosswalks.



3D. Improve Summer Event Parking Management

Event management programs are designed to allow towns to better leverage and manage parking facilities during large events. Using such a system, a town can prevent excessive parking on residential streets proximate to the event site and find partners to share reserve supply for patrons, especially during after-work hours. For events that occur regularly, such as sports events, concerts, or festivals, a town can create parking districts that allow for certain parking designations on public streets, such as resident-only, vendors-only, or temporary public parking.

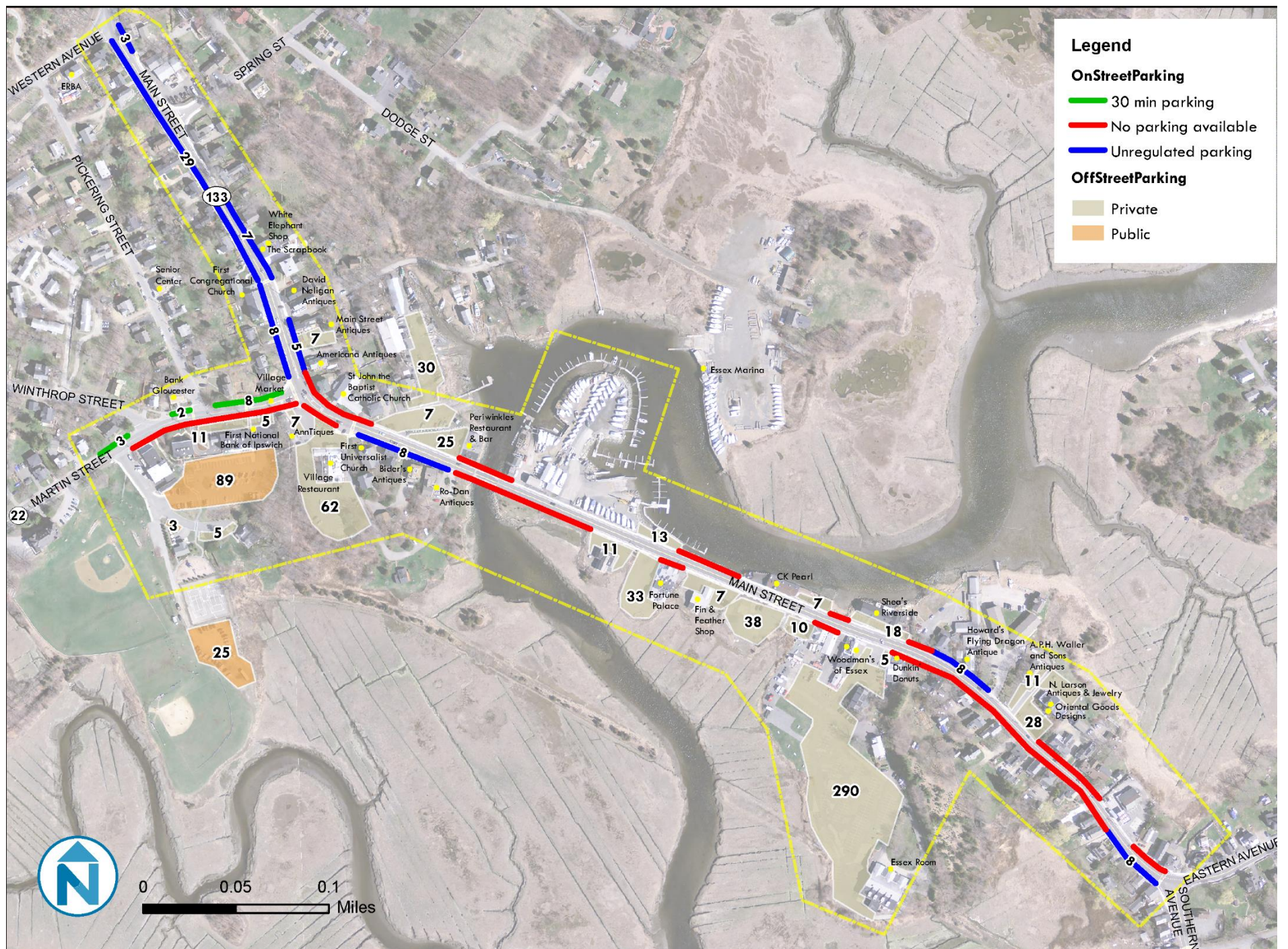
Essex should improve the parking management system during events, when infrequent guests are most likely to come to the Town Center. Strategies to improve the visitor parking experience in the area include supplemental signage for remote parking, and event/Sunday antiquing parking information via websites, postcards, and signs. Information should include guidance to parking in remote areas such as the unpaved lot near the ballfields.



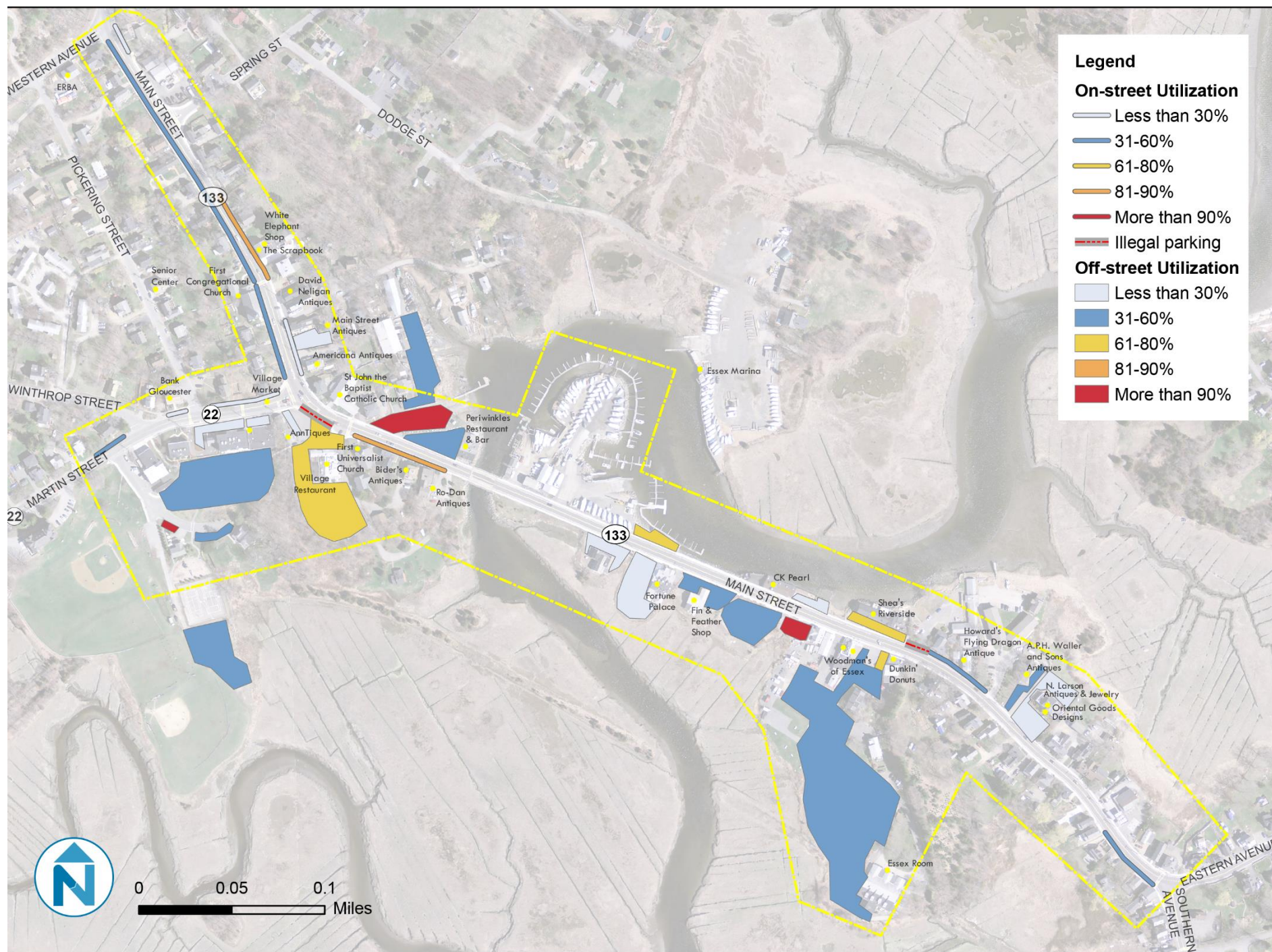


TECHNICAL APPENDICES

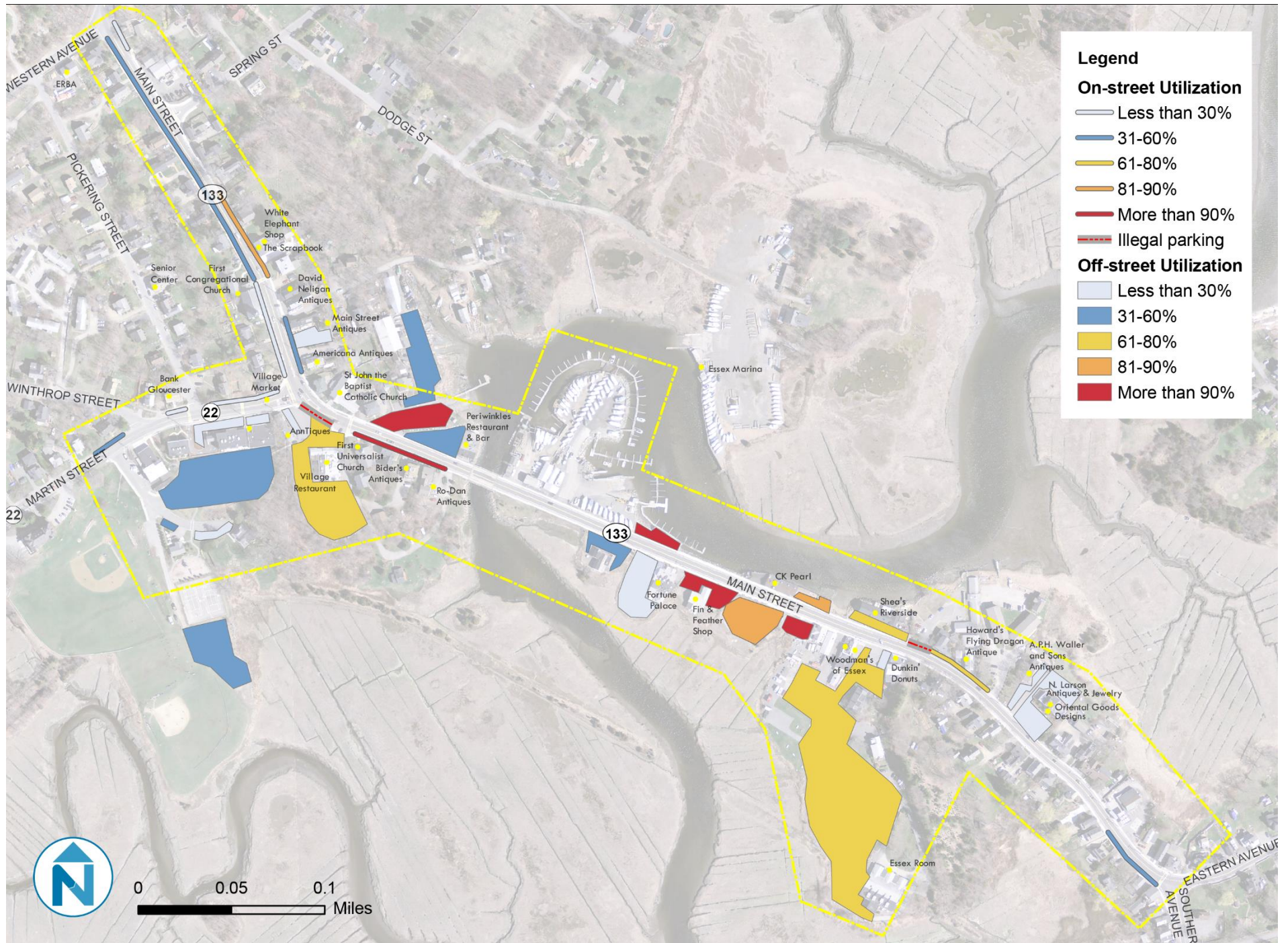
Appendix Figure 1: Essex Center Study Area Parking Inventory



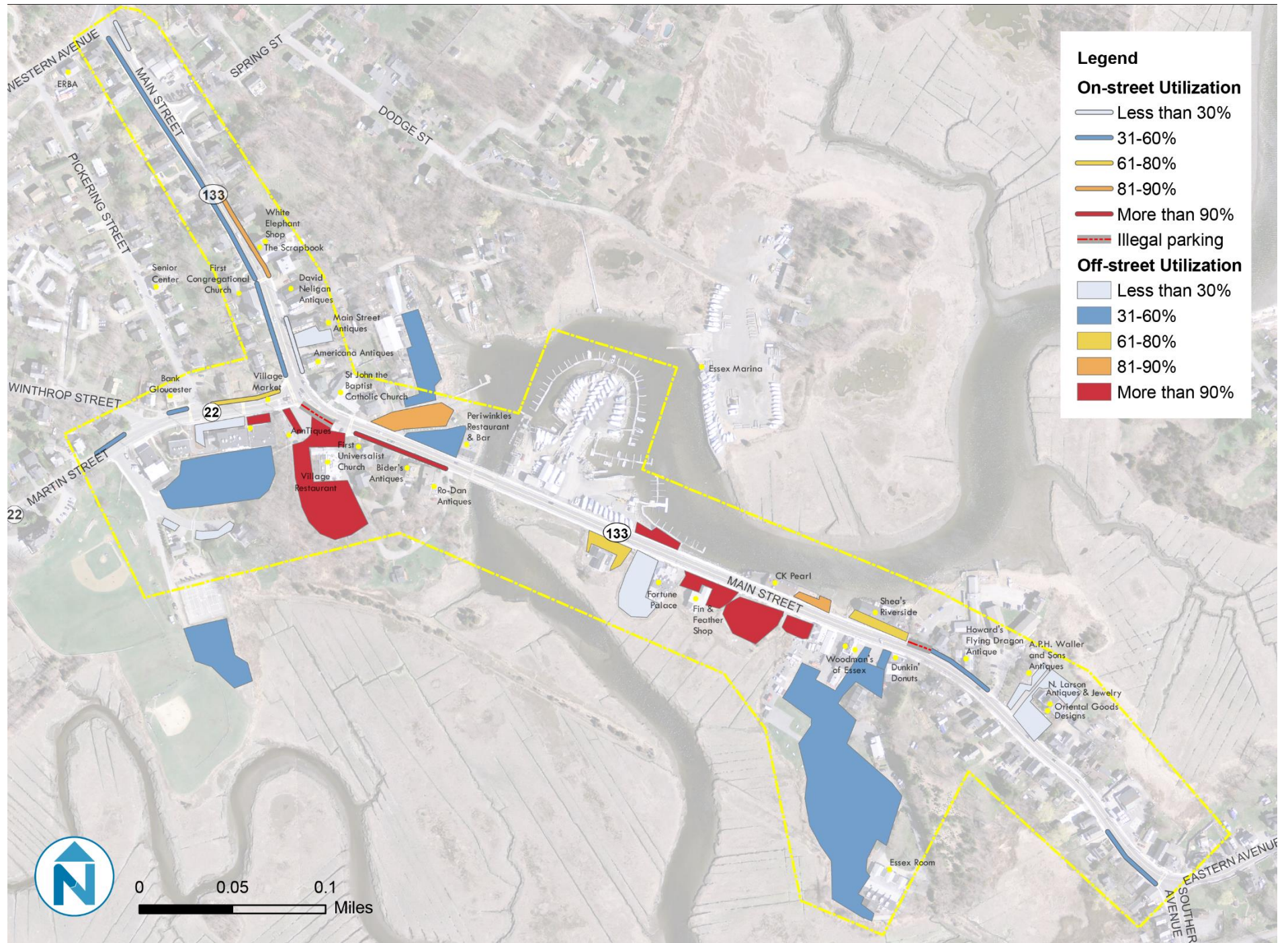
Appendix Figure 2: Essex Center Parking Peak Utilization – Saturday July 16th 12pm-2pm



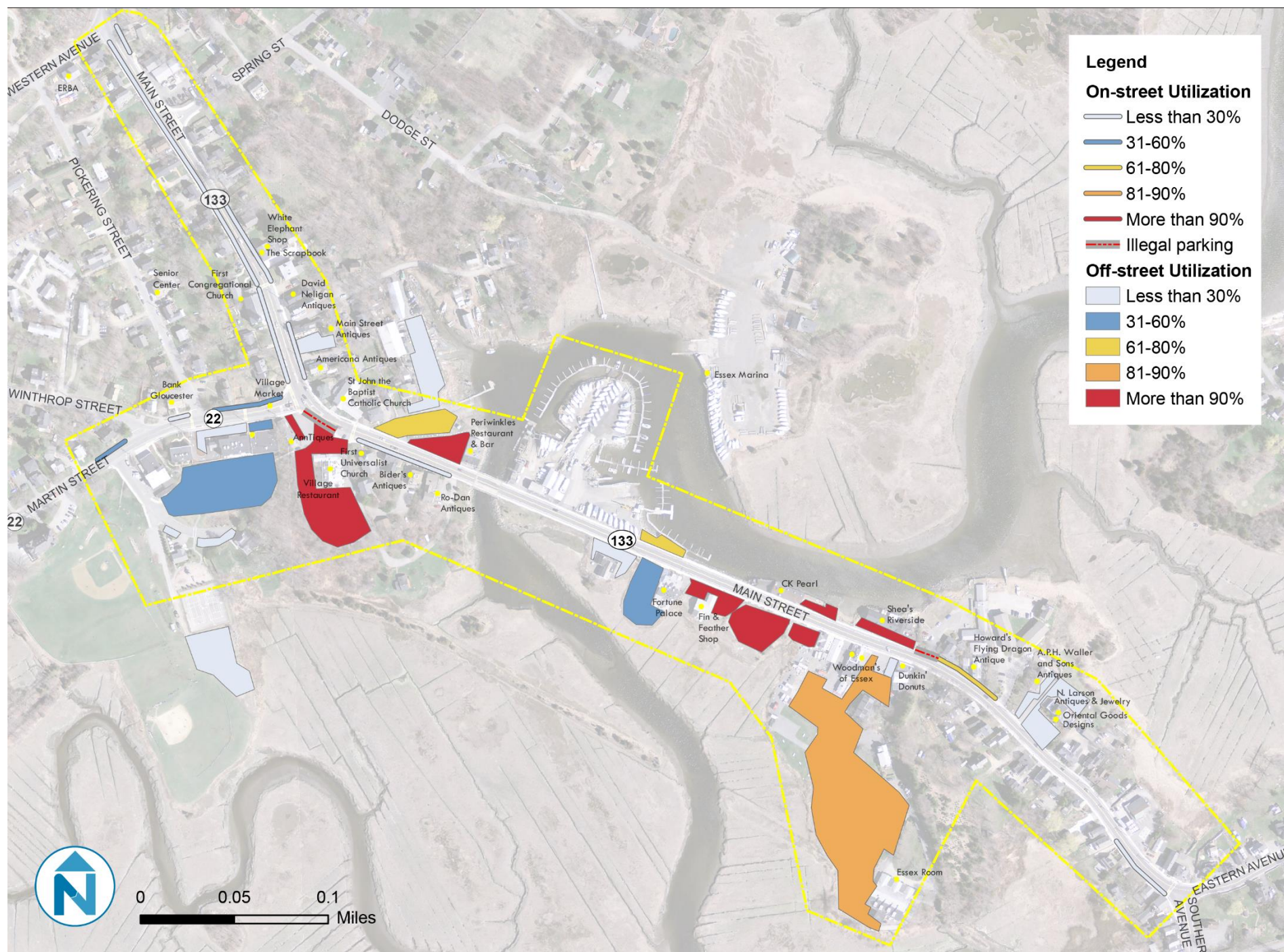
Appendix Figure 3: Essex Center Parking Peak Utilization – Saturday July 16th 2pm-4pm



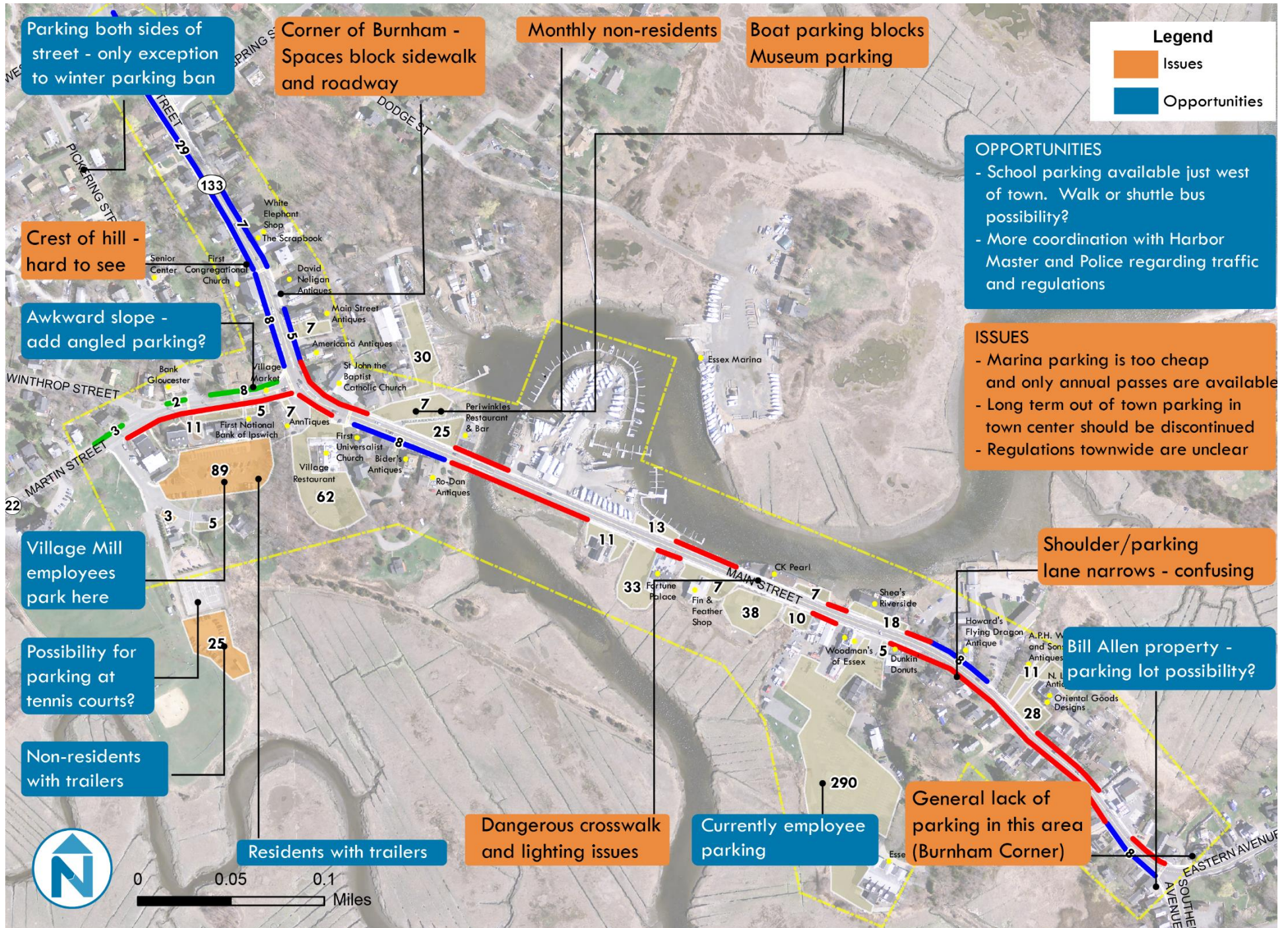
Appendix Figure 4: Essex Center Parking Peak Utilization – Saturday July 16th 4pm-6pm



Appendix Figure 5: Essex Center Parking Peak Utilization – Saturday July 16th 6pm-8pm



Appendix Figure 6: Open House Mapping Exercise Comments



Appendix Figure 7: Recommendations Overview

