MODERNIZING PUBLIC PARKING TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION AND STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY IN NEW YORK CITY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
This white paper outlines a series of parking policy proposals in New York City that can help resolve existing problems of traffic congestion, encourage more efficient and intuitive use of personal transportation within the city, and raise revenue to be reinvested in local community infrastructure. These policies aim to update and amend a street-parking scenario that is out of sync with the realities of dense urban life in New York City. Artificially low prices set by the city for on-street parking prevents driving from being affected by the pressures of supply and demand, and serves as an indirect subsidy towards personal car ownership within the nation's most dense and transit-serviced city. This white paper details three different policies: raising existing metered rates with the goal of 85 percent occupancy, introducing a residential parking permit scheme, and using public parking spaces for car-sharing. These policies are all predicated on restoring supply and demand pressures to the individual decision of personal car ownership, by assessing more appropriate parking prices through the existing on-street parking scheme and encouraging collaborative consumption as an alternative.

Brit Byrd is the Roosevelt Institute | Campus Network Senior Fellow for Economic Development. He is a senior at Columbia University studying Political Science and Spanish, and also serves as the President of the Columbia Campus Network chapter. He is interested in urban planning and design, transportation and infrastructure policy, and the sociology of public space. He is a member of the streets and public safety committee for Participatory Budgeting in New York City's 7th City Council District, and plans to pursue a career within New York City politics.

For media inquiries, please contact Rachel Goldfarb at 212.444.9130 x 213 or rgoldfarb@rooseveltinstitute.org.

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Roosevelt Institute, its donors, or its directors.
Modernizing Public Parking to Improve Transportation and Strengthen Democracy in New York City
By Brit Byrd, December 11, 2014

INTRODUCTION

New York City has succeeded at urbanism in many ways, but when it comes to curbside parking policy there is still room for improvement. For such a highly walkable and transit-serviced city, the price of parking on the street remains far too low and serves as an informal subsidy to one of the least efficient and seldom-used modes of transit in the city: personal automobiles. Only 22.7 percent of New Yorkers commute to work alone in a vehicle, and only 46 percent of households own a vehicle.¹

This white paper argues for raising the effective price of curbside parking on a neighborhood-to-neighborhood basis, beginning with the upper Manhattan neighborhood of Morningside Heights as a case study. A more effective pricing scheme will increase parking space turnover, eliminate unnecessary incentives for personal car ownership, create safer streets for pedestrians, and generate revenue to be redirected to local capital projects through participatory budgeting processes.

There are two main strategies for achieving a more effective on-street parking scheme:  
1. Increasing the cost of parking through meter rates on arterial roads and through yearly residential parking permits (RPP) on smaller side streets.  
2. Slightly lowering the supply of on-street parking by allocating a small number of existing spaces exclusively for car-sharing vehicles.

In addition to presenting these parking scheme strategies, this white paper advocates directing the revenue raised from increased rates, newly implemented permits, and contracts with car-sharing firms back towards the direct community from which it came, specifically through participatory budgeting processes that are currently being expanded throughout select city council districts in New York City.

This white paper begins by outlining the problem of traffic congestion and unnecessary harmful byproducts (or externalities) of personal vehicle ownership. It then describes the fundamental policy mechanisms at work, and compares and contrasts on-street parking policies with the related policy of congestion pricing, which has previously been attempted in New York City but failed. It discusses three main policy pillars: metered on-street parking, residential parking permits, and car-sharing partnerships. Finally, the white paper concludes by arguing for all parking related revenue to be redirected towards the local neighborhoods that generate it, based on the fundamental connection between public space and local communities.

THE PROBLEM: CONGESTION AND VEHICLE-RELATED EXTERNALITIES

There are many reasons to discourage heavy use of personal vehicles within New York City. Of course, the general negative externalities of vehicle traffic and car ownership apply in New York City just as much as anywhere else. Reducing traffic congestion, air and noise pollution, and traffic casualties, and encouraging environmentally friendly urban development through transit-oriented development are all worthy policy goals in their own right. Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration has identified many of these goals explicitly, most notably

through the Vision Zero program, aimed at eliminating pedestrian casualties entirely (estimated by the Mayor’s office as 4,000 injuries and 250 deaths every year).²

But traffic congestion is in fact an even more insidious and damaging problem for New York City than suggested by the traffic casualty figures highlighted by the mayor’s office. In a 2006 report, The Partnership for New York City identified a series of serious financial losses for the metropolitan area due to traffic congestion, including:

- $1.9 billion due to logistical, inventory, and personnel costs;
- $4.6 billion due to unrealized business revenue;
- $2 billion in wasted fuel and vehicle costs;
- 37,000 to 52,000 fewer jobs due to lost revenues and productivity.³

The case for a less car-oriented New York City is not simply an aesthetic one. Rather, the costs of added congestion are very real and damaging to the metropolitan economy. Reconfiguring on-street parking within the city will not only address this problem of congestion, but also serve to generate revenue for the city to help compensate for productivity lost to traffic congestion.

THE MECHANISMS OF MANIPULATING SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN PARKING

It would be nearly impossible to discuss parking policy without mentioning Donald Shoup, commonly referred to as the “rock star” of parking policy over the last half-century.⁴ While much of Shoup’s most famous work concerns mandatory zoning parking requirements in Sun Belt cities – a plague New York City is largely free from outside of some remaining mid-20th century public housing regulations – Shoup brings a fundamental approach to parking spaces as public rented space, and parking as an individual activity subject to market pressures of supply and demand. A central tenet of Shoup’s theory on parking is to remove market distortions such as parking requirements and artificially low on-street parking prices, so that “parking demand can once again behave according to the principles of the free market.”⁵

This proposal reflects Shoup’s specific market-oriented contention that the right price for curb parking is “the lowest price that keeps a few spaces available to allow convenient access.”⁶ Constructing a parking scheme in this way mitigates two negative consequences related to personal vehicles: traffic congestion and air pollution, which are increased by drivers cruising for cheap parking. The phenomenon of drivers circling around to find cheap parking has been well documented. In one study of six different urban sites, roughly one-third of traffic congestion consisted of people searching for cheap on-street parking.⁷

---

⁵ Ibid.
CONGESTION PRICING VS. ON-STREET PARKING PRICING: TWO DIFFERENT POLICY TOOLS, SAME FUNDAMENTAL LOGIC AND GOALS

Charging for parking and driving are proven methods for controlling traffic congestion, second only to comprehensive congestion pricing schemes. The fundamental logic of raising parking prices and congestion pricing plans is the same. Both aim to reduce the demand for vehicular traffic by raising the cost of each trip made in a vehicle to the driver. Both tools seek to manage congestion by altering demand, rather than the supply of vehicle-related amenities, such as road and highway mileage or parking spaces. The difference is in the details, in which congestion pricing is a more comprehensive policy tool. While raising on-street parking prices increases the cost of driving through individually administered parking spaces at the end of a single trip, congestion pricing charges a fee for simply entering a defined geographic zone, regardless of whether a vehicle stops and parks within it. A notable example of congestion pricing is London’s notorious plan, implemented in 2003, which charges £11.50 (approximately $18) to drivers to enter the city center between the hours of 7 am and 6 pm on weekdays. This plan exists concurrently with hourly parking charges for on-street parking, which are administered on a borough-by-borough basis. For instance, in the central borough of the City of London, home of the financial district, parking costs £4 (approximately $6.30) an hour during business hours, in addition to the cost of entering the congestion charge zone.

A robust and explicit congestion pricing plan proposed by Mayor Bloomberg, which would have assessed an $8 charge for entering Manhattan below 60th Street during peak hours, suffered a crushing political defeat in the New York State Assembly in 2008. Contrary to previous city defeats in the state house, it was downstate Democrats, rather than upstate Republicans, who proved to be decisive. Outer borough Democrats largely opposed the bill, viewing it as “Manhattan-centric” and punitive of their more car-dependent constituencies. In contrast to the familiar story of stymied progress in Albany, altering on-street parking prices represents a viable policy alternative within the city’s own purview that operates along the same logic and with the same goals as congestion pricing.

One group, MoveNY, led by traffic engineer and writer Sam Schwartz, sometimes known as Gridlock Sam, is actively campaigning for a plan that takes advantage of New York City’s dependence on bridges and tunnels to achieve very similar goals as a congestion pricing plan, although under a different name. In fact, some transit advocates have even described MoveNY’s plan as “even better” than congestion pricing, perhaps in no small part because it seems to be more politically viable than congestion pricing ever was. However, the MoveNY plan does not address administering on-street parking within the city, instead focusing on a more zonal approach administered through Metropolitan Transit Authority-controlled bridges and tunnels. Thus, there remains a need for an articulated proposal for raising on-street parking prices, regardless of the possible success of such plans as MoveNY’s. Just as in London, both policy tools can and should exist side-by-side. Both effectively use fees to disincentivize traffic congestion and its negative externalities. Moreover, readjusting on-street parking is an effective stand-alone policy that in some cases can almost substitute for congestion pricing altogether. In fact,

---

in lieu of more perfect and comprehensive congestion pricing schemes, a “simple repricing of downtown spaces and parking lots’ may solve 90 percent of most cities’ parking problems.”

**METERED ON-STREET PARKING**

On arterial roads (high capacity urban roads) such as Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue, New York City already charges hourly parking rates administered through MUNI-meters stationed at every block. Rates vary through the city (currently set at $1.00 per hour for Manhattan above 110th Street and $3.50 per hour below 96th Street) but are generally too low in comparison to the true market value of parking spaces. A sample price for a Morningside Heights off-street garage of $14 per hour for the first hour makes clear the disparity between a true market price and the currently metered prices. Such a disparity in price between on-street and garage parking has been shown to encourage drivers to circle around in search of cheap parking, prolonging driving trips and contributing to traffic congestion.

New York City already operates a pricing scheme aimed at increasing parking space turnover during hours of heavy use. “Park SMART NYC” charges variable hourly rates, with the stated goal to “free up parking spaces, increase public safety, and reduce double parking, pollution, and congestion.” Although the city does not come straight out and say it, the program seems to be heavily inspired by the Shoup school of parking policy. However, it is currently only in place in the lower Manhattan neighborhood of Greenwich Village and the Brooklyn neighborhood of Park Slope. The program’s presence in Brooklyn indicates a willingness to expand beyond the traditional confines of the metropolitan central business district (CBD), Manhattan below 60th Street. For on-street parking along arterial roads, this policy proposal does not require reinventing the wheel. Park SMART should be expanded into neighborhoods such as Morningside Heights and rates reevaluated to reach the 85 percent occupancy goal identified by Shoup, which more or less represents one free space per city block of on-street parking.

The city has also initiated a pilot program within the Arthur Avenue Business Improvement District in the Bronx that aims to allow drivers to pay for parking remotely through smart phones and check on their own vehicle’s parking status and general parking availability in real time. Interestingly, the technology also alerts drivers via text message or email when their time is close to expiration. While this might seem to be a simple 21st century convenience to the driver, from the city’s point of view, it is another tool aimed at encouraging drivers to occupy spaces no longer than necessary, increase turnover, and reduce congestion. The program appears to still be in a pilot stage, but is further indication that the city is already interested in promoting smarter, more dynamic parking schemes — and in the outer boroughs, not just lower Manhattan and brownstone Brooklyn.

Both of these programs are in the shadow of the Shoup-inspired SFpark project underway in San Francisco. SFpark explicitly identifies itself as a “demand-responsive” parking system, equipped with new infrastructure that changes rates throughout the day to meet a goal of 80 percent occupancy. SFpark released its pilot evaluation earlier this year, which is so far in line with expected outcomes. The program improved parking availability, made it easier for drivers to find a parking space, reduced traffic volume, peak period congestion, and double-parking,

---

14 Speck, Jeff. “Step 3: Get the Parking Right.” In Walkable City
and perhaps most interestingly, resulted in drivers paying 11 cents less per hour to park. The results so far are promising, and a source of validation for many parking reform advocates. Due to the cost of the high-tech infrastructure employed in SFpark, San Francisco has been serving as a sort of expensive guinea pig for other cities interested in implementing similar reforms. New York City’s Park SMART and Arthur Avenue pilot programs seem to be tentative explorations into a high tech approach. But even if funds for fully mirroring San Francisco’s high-tech infrastructure do not become available (SFpark was enabled by a hefty federal grant), SFpark’s results to date validate the fundamental logic of returning parking to market pressures.

RESIDENTIAL PARKING PERMITS
While hourly-metered on-street parking does effectively demonstrate how pricing affects parking behavior, it is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to New York City parking. Only an estimated 2 percent of parking is administered hourly through parking meters. The vast majority of on-street parking is on residential side streets and is completely free, representing an even more egregious underpricing than metered parking and another significant contributor to traffic congestion. Empirical evidence supports that on-street underpricing does result in higher personal car ownership, even for households with available off-street parking: in 2013, “free and available on-street parking increased private car ownership by 8.8 percent for households with off-street parking in the New York City region.”

Because the majority of these free residential spaces are on smaller, one-way side streets not directly adjacent to commercial storefronts, charging variable hourly rates aimed at increasing turnover for local businesses during work hours is not as relevant a concern. However, the free parking does still represent an indirect subsidy of personal car ownership and induces traffic congestion. Moreover, the free use of residential on-street parking represents a concession of a valuable public utility.

In place of metered parking on these residential side streets, New York City should implement a residential parking permit (RPP) to administer a more appropriate price for the public space being rented and eliminate the existing informal subsidy of personal car ownership and incentive for traffic congestion and other vehicle related negative externalities. In contrast to metered parking, an RPP scheme operates by charging residents a monthly or yearly charge to park within a given zone.

There are many benefits of RPP for vehicle owners: drivers can expect a higher degree of certainty that a parking spot will be available close to their front door, a simpler process for managing alternate-side parking for street cleaning, and less likelihood that they will be trapped in by non-resident double parkers seeking free short-term parking. Perhaps for these reasons, there is evidence that New York City drivers are already prepared to pay for RPP. Urban planning researchers Zhan Guo and Simon McDonnell found in 2013 that 52 percent of NYC drivers in the outer boroughs and upper Manhattan were willing to pay for a residential permit, with a median volunteered price of $408 a year, some $300 more than the next most expensive permit system, in San Francisco. When excluding the less dense and more car-dependent parts of the far outer boroughs, the data looks particularly promising. All respondents from upper Manhattan indicated that they would be willing to pay for a residential parking permit. Guo and McDonnell also note the pricing scheme outlined to respondents did not specify that revenue from permits could be directly reinvested into the neighborhood. Citing previous work of Shoup, they suggest that such information could further raise support for an RPP scheme.

---

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION AND SUPPLY-SIDE ALTERATIONS

Devoting public on-street parking space towards car-sharing infrastructure both complements the goals of on-street pricing and provides a distinct public service within itself. Hoboken’s Corner Cars program provides a good example. Hoboken, like New York City, offered free residential on-street parking. In addition to implementing fees for residential parking permits, the city implemented a “Corner Cars” program which limited the supply of parking by removing 42 corner spaces from the market and designating them for car-sharing services exclusively. The initial political backlash was strong, yet two years into the program nearly a quarter of the program’s 3,000 participants say they have given up their personal cars due to the sharing program.\(^{23}\)

Compared to other possible case studies, Hoboken offers the advantage of being within the same metropolitan area, of similar urban form, a similarly close distance to the metro area’s CBD, and similarly well-serviced by public transit.

Research shows that car-sharing programs encourage similar policy goals as increasing parking rates, and even encourage drivers to forgo personal ownership altogether in favor of collaborative consumption. Removing un-metered spots further decreases supply for drivers seeking a free space, discouraging idle cruising and congestion. Meanwhile, the car-sharing services that are advertised in place of these unmetered spots are a living example of a service that avoids the very problem that cruising drivers are experiencing: the lack of a guaranteed parking spot, and the inconvenience of simply finding any parking space anywhere at all. Car-sharing service users enjoy the certainty that the space from which they departed will be available when they return. In dense, urban, transit-serviced locales such as Hoboken and Upper Manhattan, those who only use their private vehicles very occasionally - and in New York City, only 54 percent of households that use on-street parking were found to use their cars on a typical weekday\(^{24}\) - may be open to abandoning the yearly costs of maintenance and insurance in favor of a subscription to a car-sharing service. All of these factors may well have contributed to the fact that in Hoboken, each successful Corner Car is estimated to have replaced 17 private vehicles.\(^{25}\)

Of course, as with any private-public partnership, the terms of private contracts given out are important. Although car-sharing does offer the benefits of reduced congestion and personal vehicle ownership, it would make little sense to object to the current free use of public space by a small set of citizens, to only then turn around and give said space to private firms carte blanche. Participating municipalities should not let the excitement of introducing innovative collaborative consumption programs blind them from remaining vigilant in the old, paramount practice of prudent contract negotiations. Thankfully, there is precedent for similar private-public partnerships where firms fairly paid cities for the public space they occupied. In 2012, the firm Car2Go paid Washington DC $2,890 per car for access to parking zones across the city and $1,009 per car to the city of Portland in a similar deal.\(^{26}\) Although this proposal advocates for a Hoboken-style model of specific, demarcated, and reserved spaces rather than the all-access passes granted to Cars2Go, the DC and Portland examples demonstrate a private firm’s willingness to pay for public parking space. Public spaces offer significant benefits to these firms and are worthwhile investments. Highly visible corner spaces serve as effective advertisements for their service, in comparison to spaces many firms already occupy tucked away in off-street garages. And within a Hoboken-style model of reserved spaces, firms would still be able to advertise the main selling point of the increased convenience of not having to worry about a parking space at the end of a journey. For a Hoboken Corner Cars model in New York City, calculating the cost of such a space could be as simple as charging the

---


expected revenue of that space for the year, whether that is as a MUNI-metered space or a space administered by an RPP.

The neighborhood of Morningside Heights is a good example of why many New York City neighborhoods are well positioned for a car-sharing program for two reasons. First, its geography would make coverage easy to achieve. The neighborhood is thin, and placing corner cars every few blocks on the two main arterial roads of Broadway and Amsterdam would provide comprehensive coverage. This kind of geography is not unique to Morningside Heights. The vast majority of Manhattan is situated on the same transit-serviced grid street network that would make comprehensive coverage feasible, and denser, more central areas of the outer boroughs are similar. Second, the preeminent presence of Columbia University in the neighborhood is an example of an anchor institution that provides a user base with a low existing car ownership rate, but often in need of moving services, bulk shopping trips, and other trips made easier by car. Similar anchor institutions are dotted all around the city’s map, including but not limited to other universities, public housing, and large churches. The demand for car-sharing services near Columbia University seems to already be affirmed by the market. The car-sharing company ZipCar already has a partnership program with the university and cars in an off-street garage at 110th Street and Broadway, among many other upper Manhattan locations. Enacting a Corner Cars program could be as simple as moving these cars out into the open. Given all of these favorable conditions and the existing proof that car-sharing is already feasible in the area, Morningside Heights can serve as an effective case study for dense transit-serviced neighborhoods. If devoting public spaces to car-sharing does not work there, then it is unlikely to work better in less-dense outer borough neighborhoods.

INCREASED REVENUES: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GREATER CIVIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

All three policies discussed above generate new revenue for the city. From parking meters alone, the city’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reports an expected revenue of $204 million. With the introduction of more “Park SMART NYC” reforms, these revenues could increase. Parking reforms aimed at achieving 85 percent occupancy have already proven effective at raising revenue across the country. The Shoup-inspired SFpark project in San Francisco reported that although increasing revenue was not a main goal of the policy, parking revenue increased by $1.9 million across the city.

However, despite being so revenue-friendly, San Francisco still presents an example of the kind of political struggle involved in introducing parking reforms. SFpark has run into resistance from car owners who still expect cheap or free on-street parking, despite the program’s very promising start. Advocates of the program note that although the city took note of Shoup’s studies on how to properly price parking spaces, it ignored his recommendation to redirect revenue back to business improvement districts to shore up local support. A San Francisco based urban planning blog summarizes the state of the debate by noting that, “abstract citywide benefits like reduced traffic and pollution, or increased turnover for businesses, can usually be demonstrated only with numbers reported by a government agency, which doesn’t seem to resonate well with those who can only remember digging for quarters at a meter.” The promise of direct reinvestment of revenue to the neighborhood assuages this situation, and has already proved effective within the Tristate area, in Hoboken. But better yet, in New York City there is already an on-going project that is an ideal vehicle for such reinvestment: Participatory Budgeting.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is an innovative, progressive, and successful project worth bolstering in New York City. PB aims to make local government more accessible to its corresponding community and especially underserviced populations, through the control of its funds. Although PB only just arrived in New York City in 2011, it has molded well to the particular cogs and wheels of city governance, with the help of strong support from the city council’s growing Progressive Caucus. In New York City, PB operates on the scale of city council districts, with each council member deciding whether or not to participate. The minimum allocation of $1 million devoted to PB projects comes from funds otherwise allocated to member items, wherein council members more unilaterally decide which projects to fund.

In 2013, PB’s second year in City Council District 8 (previously encompassing sections of the Upper West Side, now since redistricted to East Harlem and the South Bronx) traditionally underserviced populations such low-income people, seniors, and people of color showed high levels of participation. Overall participation was good, and the district met the minimum allocation of $1 million, ultimately allocating $1.9 million to six different projects, largely dealing with public housing improvements. So far in New York City, PB has observed similar successes seen across the world of increasing democratic participation among traditionally low-participation populations.  

Existing parking revenue in New York City is distributed as a whole to other parts of the city budget without particular regard for the source of the income. Given that SFpark reported a $1.9 million increase in meter revenues - three percent on the FY 2014 city-wide total of $53 million despite being only in select neighborhoods - the revenue increasing ability of these reforms is significant, and would further add on to the already substantial sum of $204 million in parking revenue in New York City. These new revenues, even if they only meet half of the expectations set by San Francisco, would constitute a meaningful addition to existing PB budgets, without reducing the existing revenue that is already distributed. And in each participating PB district, there already exists a list of eligible destinations: projects that met funding criteria, received community approval, but were not funded due to budget shortages. New revenues from each district could be applied to such projects, with the goal of exhausting the backlog of all qualifying proposals. The Office of Budget and Management does not currently itemize parking meter revenue by council district, but given that the installation of newer digital “MUNI” meters was completed in 2013, doing so should not be too arduous a task.

But introducing PB is not just a political solution. The most foundational argument for directing revenue to participatory budgeting involves the fundamental connection between public space and a community’s economic and social wellbeing. The idea that the quality of public space is linked to the health of a community seems obvious and widely agreeable. And if pressed on the question, surely a wide majority of policy makers, urban planners, traffic engineers, and bureaucrats would agree. Yet still, policy often zooms in on the figures written in planning codes and budget appendices at the expense of the perspective of the citizen on the street. There has been some progress in the last half-century. Cities and towns have elected officials and employed professionals who understand and have implemented policy investing in quality public space. But at the end of the day it is difficult to expect every legislator and staffer to have a finger on the pulse of every single street corner when they allocate millions of dollars across the entirety of their districts. The residents of each city block, on the other hand, do have an intimate familiarity with their public space. Participatory budgeting is a particularly elegant mechanism in the domain of parking policy because it pairs the expertise of policy makers concerned with macro policy goals with the expertise of citizens who have an unrivaled perspective on the quality and needs of their own public space. All the while, the connection between governance, policy, and municipal revenue is made more concrete and visible to participating citizens.

---

Public space is a community’s most basic and essential resource. Each 8’ x 22’ parking space represents 176 sq. feet of public space ceded to private property. And this space is not free to construct and maintain. The cheapest parking spot in the country costs $4,000 to build – and this figure assumes the space is built on essentially worthless land, a far cry from New York City real estate.33 Occupying a parking space and feeding a parking meter is paying rent on a piece of public property that the public pays to build and maintain. The revenue raised by this rent has a more direct connection to the physical landscape and infrastructure than other municipal revenues, such as income or sales taxes. Further, this intuitive link between revenue raised from the rent of public space and investment in communal infrastructure contains an argument for social fairness in areas such as Manhattan, where car owners tend to be slightly wealthier. Urban planning researchers Zhan Guo and Simon McDonnell concisely summarize such a connection between the parking infrastructure of dense urban communities and the problem of the social unfairness of free on-street parking:

Many argue that free residential street parking is also socially unfair, particularly in a dense urban setting where car ownership is not ubiquitous and parking supply varies by residence even on the same street. In these areas, parking spaces on residential streets represent a valuable public asset, which is paid by all residents but allocated free of charge only to car owners who tend to have a higher income. What is more, the opportunity cost of this space is what could otherwise occupy that space, e.g. extended sidewalks, pocket parks, bike lanes etc, available to everybody.34

The capital at the disposal of PB districts is available for the exact kind of communal infrastructure investments that Guo and McDonnell highlight. Connecting rented revenue from existing street infrastructure and directing it towards existing and transparent processes for investing in more street infrastructure is intuitive. And above all, correcting the cost of car ownership within the city and aspiring to remove car-related externalities is an admirable and necessary goal in itself. Reinvesting the revenue into democratically and locally assigned capital projects represents a positive and progressive policy that substantively reconnects the essential importance of physical space to our communities.

CONCLUSION—THE DEMONSTRATIVE VALUE OF PARKING AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHERE THE RUBBER OF POLICY MEETS THE ROAD

Parking policy is an admittedly a tricky thing to get people passionate about. It is a textbook example of a policy topic you might hear mentioned on the likes of Parks and Recreation to lampoon the less glorious minutiae of local governance. Modern government, despite its relatively large size, is often said to be ‘invisible.’ While taxes, fees, and rent charged by the government can be very apparent to the individual citizen, the resources they provide can all too easily slip into the background of daily routine. However, parking, precisely because it is so quotidian, is not invisible and can serve as a prime example of a kind of policy that with the right adjustments can not only achieve admirable policy goals, but also encourage citizens to conceptualize the relationship between public space, individuals, government, and its funds.

Reducing traffic congestion and encouraging collaborative consumption and mass transit are goals that all cities should pursue. New York City is no exception, regardless of the fact that it already ranks highly among North American cities in density, walkability, and transit use. Cleaner, safer, and more efficient urban settings are always possible and should remain a policy goal of all municipalities. Altering the pricing scheme for on-street parking through increased metered rates, residential parking permits, and public car-sharing spaces represents a step towards a better New York City for all of its citizens. But here too there is also a policy byproduct that is greater than the sum of its parts. Connecting the ubiquitous public resource of parking spots with the more arcane and

less accessible processes of municipal budgeting makes government less invisible to the citizen on the street. Although it is a modest first step, adjusting parking policy in New York City can serve as a functional public example of where the rubber meets the road when it comes to policy, politics, and the public space we all inhabit.