The Ins and Outs of "Smart Parking"

Don't underestimate the impact that parking systems can have on a city's sustainability.

Supported by an Innovation Fund grant, parking system managers from Albany, Burlington, Cambridge, New York City, Oak Park IL, Philadelphia, Santa Monica, and Washington DC studied best practices, case studies, and parking management strategies, and how to address communications, financing, and legal challenges. Jennifer Green, Burlington's sustainability coordinator, organized and hosted the process, which included participation in a "parking summit" held by the Burlington Business Association. Jeffrey Tumlin of Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates offered a "Getting Smarter about Parking" primer.

Starting with the common problems of parking systems, Tumlin noted that parking wastes money and land, worsens housing affordability, and produces traffic congestion. He identified 16 tools that cities can use to change the game:

1. Residential permits
2. Smart meters—accept all common forms of payment; provide data on usage
3. Smart technology—provide information about street and parking garage space availability
4. Right price
5. Right time—hours of operation
6. Invest revenue—in signage, lighting, paving, benches, street and alleyway improvements, etc.
7. Flex your parking
8. Eliminate minimum parking requirements—tailor parking requirements by density, transit access, income, household size
9. Replace minimums with maximums—some cities have abolished minimum requirements citywide or in districts
10. Design well—parking garages that look like buildings, with active ground floor uses; wrap above-grade parking in landscaping
11. Be careful with driveways
12. Unbundle—separate the price of parking from the price of rental and multifamily housing
13. Encourage tandem/stack/valet parking
14. Share
15. Get smart about residential permits
16. Park once—mixed use, park-once districts with shopping, work, school, recreation areas: require less parking, fewer vehicle miles traveled, less land area

For more information, see Tumlin's "Sustainable Transportation Planning."

Following the convening, five of the participating cities decided to work together on developing public-private parking initiatives in their communities. In August 2014, the USDN Innovation Fund approved their request for a follow-up grant.