

City of Norwalk, Connecticut

Enabling economic development through
smart parking and mobility tools

Background

In 2002, the Norwalk Parking Authority was created by ordinance to operate and manage both on-street and off-street parking in the City of Norwalk's urban core. At the time, there were significant capital investments being made to the city's parking infrastructure, including the construction of the 725-space Maritime Garage in South Norwalk. "You can't have economic development without mobility," says Kathryn Hebert, Director of the Transportation, Mobility, and Parking Department for the City of Norwalk, who oversees the Norwalk Parking Authority.

To account for the diversity of Norwalk's constituents, which include the city's business community, residents, and visitors, the Norwalk Parking Authority partnered with a parking operator to support the operations and management of the program and a marketing agency to support the city's community outreach efforts. "We're a growing city. We have a lot of development going on and a lot of people moving into the city. So, there's a need to continue managing the City of Norwalk's parking assets through parking management best practices," says Hebert.

The Norwalk Parking Authority has taken a multi-vendor approach to the city's parking solutions, which include single-space meters, multi-space kiosks, permitting, pay-by-phone apps, and enforcement technologies. Today, Norwalk has a total of 4,281 on-street and off-street parking spaces across town.

Offering a mobile payment option in Norwalk

In October 2011, the Norwalk Parking Authority decided to introduce a mobile payment option to its constituents in order to provide them with a convenient, on-the-go option to pay for parking. "ParkMobile was already the leader in the game and required no upfront capital costs to the City of Norwalk," says Hebert, when reflecting on the city's decision to select ParkMobile as their mobile parking payment provider. The city first launched a 6-month pilot program in South Norwalk to see how constituents would respond to the new payment option. When the app received a positive response, the Norwalk Parking Authority expanded the launch throughout the remainder of the city.



Norwalk, CT by the numbers

 **89,000+**

Residents

 **880**

On-street parking spaces

 **3,401**

Off-street parking spaces

 **158%**

Increase in transactions
from 2018 to 2020

To create awareness around the app, the Norwalk Parking Authority hosted a press conference, engaged local and regional media, and marketed the app to Norwalk's business community and residents. In the city's first month after deployment, 130 transactions were processed through ParkMobile. Today, 15,000-16,000 transactions are processed every month by the app's approximately 8,000 monthly users in Norwalk. In just the past two years, transactions in the app have grown 158%. "99% of the time, once someone uses the app, they never go back," says Hebert. The Norwalk Parking Authority additionally offers parking reservations, event parking discounts, and a commercial validation program through ParkMobile.

Prioritizing customer outreach

When it came to educating constituents about the app, the city prioritized strategic marketing and continued outreach before and after deployment. "The key is to keep getting the word out," says Hebert. "You need to proactively remind the market about the app, and this requires constant communication." Hebert's approach to marketing ParkMobile to the city's constituents has been to simply present the app as an available option. Signage around town advertises "Two Ways to Pay" – either at a meter or through the ParkMobile app. The marketing also highlighted the benefit of using the app outside of Norwalk at ParkMobile's 400+ locations across the United States. Additionally, the Norwalk Parking Authority offers a \$2 discount for new users as an incentive to start using the app.

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Kathryn Hebert

Director of Transportation, Mobility, and Parking for the City of Norwalk

Since the app's launch, the Norwalk Parking Authority has remained active and responsive in its communications to customers through its website and social media channels. "Most of what we hear is that it's easy to use," says Hebert. "The city's users value the convenience of the app, as well as its user-friendly features, such as the ability to opt into notifications, store multiple vehicles, and extend time remotely. If we have a customer get a ticket when using a meter or kiosk, we suggest that they use the app to help them avoid one the next time."



Next steps

The City of Norwalk is always looking for new ways to enhance economic development. Last year, ParkMobile expanded to the city's parks and beaches. While residents with permits are exempt from payment, visitors to the city are now required to pay for parking at these locations. The city has also focused on adaptive reuse, partnering with the Norwalk Arts Commission to host quarterly exhibits at one of the city's parking facilities and enabling a parklet program that allows the business community to convert on-street spaces to mixed-use spaces, such as outdoor dining, during the city's warm months.

In the future, the Norwalk Parking Authority wants to enable better wayfinding that connects to the in-car experience through the ParkMobile app. "If people knew directly where to go, it would alleviate a lot of frustration and mitigate traffic," says Hebert. Additionally, the city is looking for new ways to better manage the curb to accommodate for the rise of multimodal transportation options, such as ride-hailing, bike-sharing, and shuttle systems, throughout the city.