

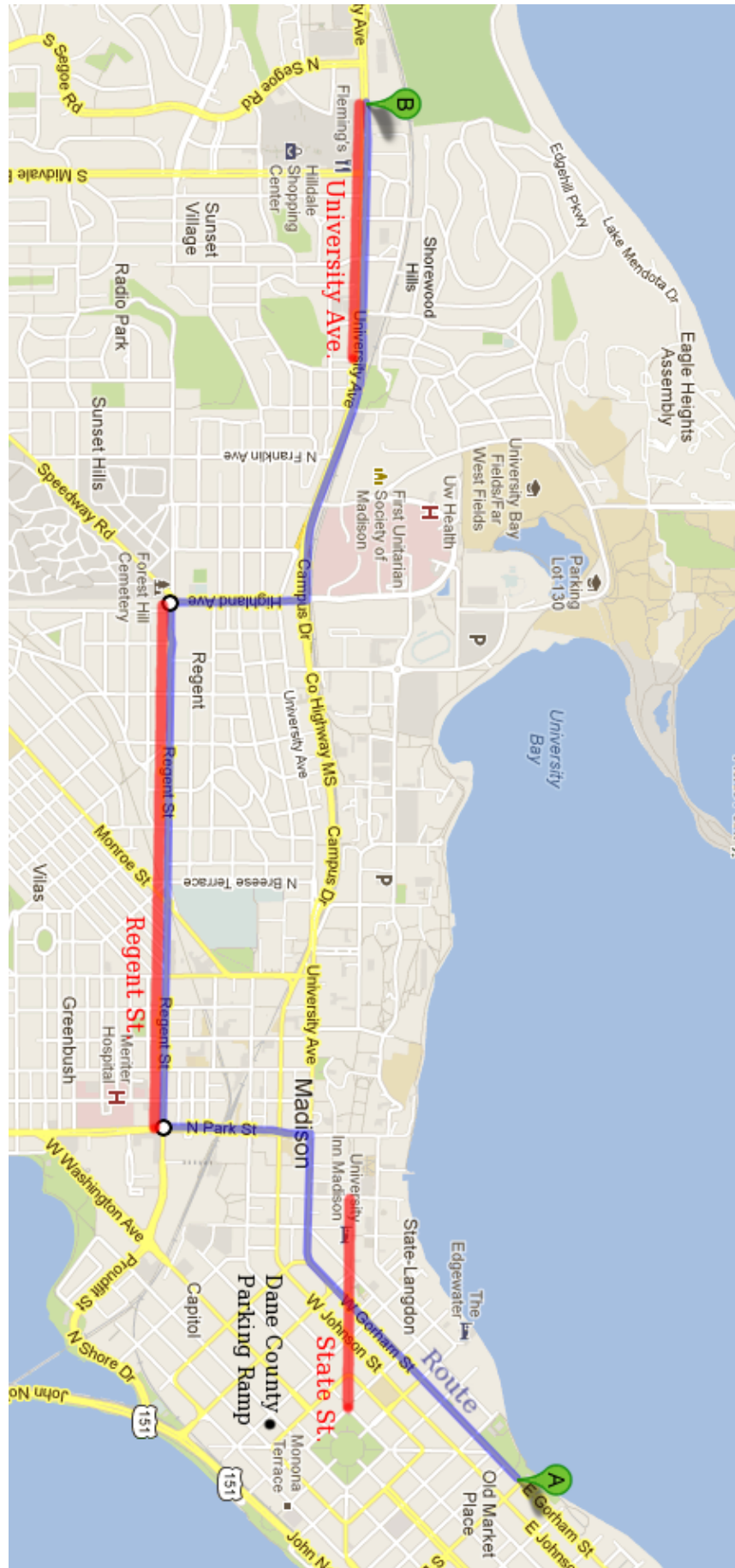
From Strip to Suburb: The Dangers of Parking in Madison, WI

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Environmental Studies 460
Professor William Cronon
November 19, 2012

Sitting in my room with my legs propped up on my desk, I recline as I read the latest assignment in my environmental history class, *Suburban Nation* by Andres Duany, et al. I read, “Between one third and one half of urban America’s land is typically dedicated to driving and parking of vehicles.”¹ Wow, I think. That’s a lot of space. My concentration is jostled when my phone vibrates on the table. Leaning over to get a better view, I read the text: “Hey Em. We’re almost in Madison. Where should we park? From Dad.” I sigh in exasperation. I think through the list of possibilities: It would be best if he could park right outside my apartment, but the one side allowed for street parking is almost always full. Plus, there’s a two-hour limit, and my family will probably be here for four or five. There are a couple of private lots around, but you need a permit, which can cost anywhere between \$65 and \$150 a month. Some UW lots are free on the weekends, but seeing as this is a Friday morning, that will not work. Other UW lots offer \$12 one-day permits, but then you have to go through the hassle of driving to the UW Transportation Services office to get the permit, and who knows which lots they will have available.² The Lake Street Parking Garage might be the best choice, even though it costs \$1.25 an hour and is quite far away from my apartment.³ At least it is centrally located. I pick up my phone to help my dad navigate the parking possibilities from State Street to Regent Street to University Avenue, a journey across Madison in space and time, from downtown to the suburbs and back again. Sometimes, I wish there was a Wal-Mart next door, so that there would be endless expanses of pavement in my backyard, and plenty of room to park.

This is a map of the route that is driven throughout the essay. Purple corresponds to the actual route (from A to B), red corresponds to the three strips examined, and black corresponds to an important landmark.



As I talk to my dad, I imagine I'm in the car with him, seeing Madison through his unaccustomed eyes. I drive up East Washington, the gleaming Capitol before me, a spectacle in and of itself. I take a right onto Blount and then a quick left onto Gorham Street, the main east-to-west thoroughfare that cuts through the core of downtown Madison. Gorham intersects State Street, the road that connects the Capitol with the University. A capitol building was erected the year following Madison's creation in 1836. The first class at the University of Wisconsin assembled in 1849. Ever since then, if not before, a street has existed, connecting the two hearts of the city. As I look to my left down State, I see a diverse array of storefronts that line both sides, some with obnoxiously large signs to catch the eyes of passersby. The buildings are crammed together and pushed up right against the sidewalk, as if the street were walled in. Trees, benches, bike racks, and bus stop shelters share the wide sidewalks with pedestrians, and the Capitol looms at the end, an ever-present icon of downtown. The strangest thing, however, is not the presence of something unusual; rather, it is an absence. The street is empty of cars, except for the occasional bus, taxi, or delivery vehicle. Now I notice the "Do Not Enter" signs, prohibiting the everyday driver from accessing this pedestrian street.

State Street was the first commercial strip in Madison, originally designed to accommodate streetcars, dating back to the late 1800s. Buildings began lining the street before the 1860s, although many were residential.⁴ By 1885-1897 (see Sanborn Map and Figure 1), the road began to develop economically, starting with the 100 block closest to the capital. State was a fully realized and thriving



Figure 1: "View from Capitol Dome Looking West." 1897. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Album 07 (Madison, Wisconsin: Views of the Isthmus). Image ID: 11211

commercial strip by 1937.⁵ For 30 years, from 1892 to the 1920s, streetcars were the dominant mode of vehicle transportation. One line ran down State Street from the Capitol to Park, turning left and then right onto University. By 1901, the streetcar was running more frequently than some buses today, twelve minutes apart.⁶ However, the rise of the individualized automobile coincided with the fall of the communal streetcar, and in turn created a new problem: parking.

For a time, there was enough space on State Street to provide sufficient on-street parking to satisfy those who ventured to its storefronts. However, as the automobile became more prevalent, the obvious question arose:

where do we park our cars? The old downtown style commercial strip was not made for cars in excess. Although its large signs and compact storefronts drew the attention of passing automobile, room for parking was sparse. According to Andres Duany et al., “When buildings of different size do adjoin, they still collaborate to define the space of the street, usually by pulling up right against the sidewalk...[making the place] a delight, the kind of place that people visit just to be there.”⁷ Madison’s downtown was built up before cars became commonplace, so sticking a parking lot behind a State Street shop meant that something else had to go. In



Figure 2: "200 Block of State Street from West Johnson Street." 1913. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Album 07 (Madison, Wisconsin: Views of the Isthmus). Image ID: 3150



Figure 3: "Wisconsin State Capital from 200 Block of State Street." 1939. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Hone, Harold N., 1892-1970. Image ID: 1892

terms of parking, State Street can almost be seen as a preserved version of an older commercial strip because, as of 1974, cars were outlawed.

In a press release dating March 20, 1974, M. Paul Friedberg & Associates suggested various options for the newly zoned pedestrian street. One possibility was a regional shopping center, which they pointed out would require “vast rehabilitation and reordering of priorities with restructuring of existing transportation systems to facilitate easy access



Figure 4: "State Street from Bascom Hill." 1971. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Place File Image ID: 51707; just before cars were prohibited on State St.**

and sufficient parking areas.” If State Street was promoted purely to increase economic activity by attracting consumers from outer areas, massive changes in transportation planning would have to occur to make downtown easier to navigate for a greater number of people, at the expense of buildings that have existed for at least half a century. A second option, the one M. Paul Friedberg & Associates ultimately supported, endorsed State Street as a center for culture and urban renewal with “an urban based residential population,” providing a location for activities to service those living in the city, rather than those living in surrounding suburbs. In this case, “it becomes unnecessary to make drastic alterations to accommodate cars and parking.”⁸ Parking is an immense issue on the isthmus, especially near State Street, due to lack of space, which is why the second option seems so much more desirable. If the city focused on enhancing a downtown population, cars and parking would be unnecessary, allowing more space for other shops and buildings to enhance the Capitol area. Madison, however, did not choose urban renewal. Instead, Madison sprawled.

I continue down Gorham, and turn right around the bend onto University Avenue. I pass the Fluno Center on the left as we cross Frances Street, which houses an underground parking ramp and is neighbors with an above-ground garage. At the next light, Lake Street, there's a parking ramp on either side of me, the public State Street Campus Garage to the right and the private underground garage beneath Madison Fresh Market to the left. Hoping to find a spot closer to my apartment, I continue to drive along University and take a left on Park Street, following it all the way down to Regent. Taking a right, I see a view similar to the one I just saw: another commercial strip, except this one had been adjusted to accommodate cars.

Fragments of the old strip remain, such as buildings pushed up to the street leaving only enough room for a sidewalk, a few big signs calling to motorists, and street parking on both sides. There are, however, a few stores with parking out front, visible for all to see. It is as if parking had replaced the old signs for advertising, saying



Figure 5: "Regent Street Highway Project." 1935. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Album 05 (Madison, Wisconsin: Views of Lakes and Neighborhoods." Image ID: 35499. Description: View from the intersection of Regent and Monroe.

Hey! Come to our store! Look at how

easy and inexpensive it is to park! This strip developed later and is more spread out than State Street, as seen in Figure 5. In 1908, there was little to no development on Regent, which was then called Washington Street. By 1917, there were some residents but few stores. The number of commercialized buildings had significantly increased by 1937, but they were not as tightly packed together as a typical commercial strip.⁹ Because Regent developed later, was more spread

out, and allowed cars for a longer period than State Street did, it is the perfect segue from old-time strip to the modern strip of today. It still has strip-like feel, but has adjusted for cars to draw people in who are tired of the constant hunt for the perfect parking space.

However, these upfront parking lots have a price: pedestrian life. As more lots are constructed on commercial strips, the use of on-street parking declines. Parallel-parked cars form a metal wall between the sidewalk and the street, offering protection to walkers. On-street parking also slows traffic, as drivers are always wary of cars pulling in and out from the sides. Not only are benefits felt by sidewalk-users, small businesses and drivers profit as well. When motorists parallel-park it is usually not directly in front of their destination. This causes them to walk the strip, gaze into stores as they pass by, socialize with friends or acquaintances they run into, and interact with their city. On-site parking lots offer only the value of ease, which makes life a lot less interesting.¹⁰ Not only do parking lots take up significant amounts of space, but they also threaten social ties within a community, as well as the livelihoods of the people who live and sell there.

As we pass through Regent Street, Dad and I decide to forgo parking for now. We hang up the phone and he picks me up from my apartment for a quick trip to Hilldale Mall. I am in dire need of groceries and Target is a whole lot cheaper than Madison Market; plus, parking is a lot easier, and I won't have to carry food back on my bike. I take a right on Highland, and after a few blocks, take a left on Campus Drive, which will soon merge back with University Ave. The south side of the street contains an exaggerated version of the Regent strip: some stores are pushed up to the sidewalk, but many parking lots litter the land adjacent to them. The north side is lined with tasteful shrubbery, which gives way as we cross Franklin Ave to reveal the modern



Figure 6: "University Station Sign." November 18, 2012. Taken by Emily McKinney.



Figure 7: "University Station." November 18, 2012. Taken by Emily McKinney.

strip. A long, uniform building with a green roof sits well back from the street. Without the changing names on the building's brow, I would not be able to tell where one shop ends and the next begins. A drab sign reading "University Station" is an eyesore to passing cars. In front of this terribly ordinary building lies a nicely paved and well-landscaped parking lot.

Old commercial strips, like State Street, were created to catch the eye of the automobile and also to facilitate and enrich the life of the pedestrian. This modern strip has forgotten the pedestrian entirely and is geared solely toward the car. The speed limit on University is 35 miles per hour, but without on-street parking, motorists generally go 40 or 45, in contrast to the 20-25 miles per hour that one would drive on a strip like Regent, or on State Street back in 1974. Parking lots are provided in nearly every shopping complex, making it easy to get in and get out with the stuff you need. This excess is further portrayed as I continue down University to Hilldale Mall, a massive complex of chain stores surrounded by a sea of parking. By putting a parking lot in front of the store, the shop is less oriented toward its local neighbors and more so toward strangers driving by. Many of these stores with ample parking are also chains, as shown by those in Hilldale Mall. People have an apparent preference for chain stores, perhaps for the same reasons they like parking lots: their ease and their predictability.¹¹ These havens of free and easy parking invite consumers from all around the city, promoting the business of these chains.

Contrast this with the metered strip, or the State Street parking garage, where access to stores not only requires walking, but is also more expensive. How parking is managed in and of itself promotes suburban malls over small local businesses, which reduces the opportunity for community growth.¹²

The ease of parking increases as you go farther out from the heart of the city, encouraging the use of the automobile and changing people's perspective. According to Duany, "As a motorist, you cannot get to know your neighbor, because the prevailing relationship is competitive. You are competing for asphalt, and if you so much as hesitate or make a wrong move, your neighbor immediately punishes you, by honking the horn, [or] taking your space..."¹³ Access to parking encourages the use of cars, which isolates us and makes us less social, destroying our sense of community. The low-density sprawling city (Madison, for example, as seen in Figure 8 and 9) relies on the car and on parking availability, for without it, getting 20 miles from home to work would be unfeasible. As more parking lots are constructed, the city will continue to sprawl, and its citizens will continue to isolate themselves in their automobiles, as well as their homes. Sprawl hurts children who are stuck in their cul-de-sacs; parents who can't go anywhere, such as the grocery store or the bowling alley, without hopping into the car; teens who are isolated from their peers; and the elderly who become stranded without a driver's license, out of reach of necessary physical and social services. Sprawling infrastructure is expensive, and while developers and businesses are concerned with building up the outskirts of town for the rich, the poor in the inner city suffer.¹⁴ Sprawl will be the death of our city, and parking lies at its heart.

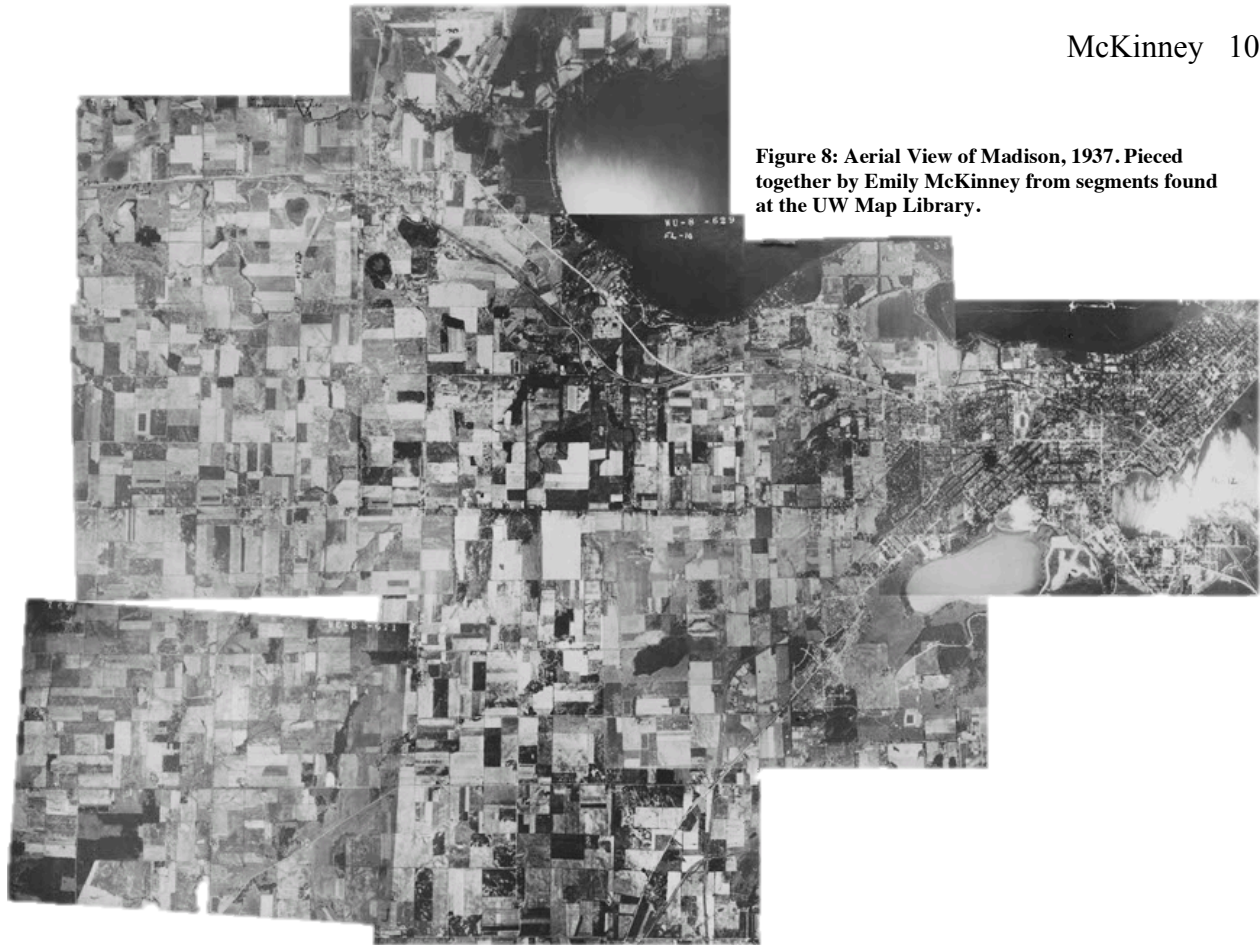


Figure 8: Aerial View of Madison, 1937. Pieced together by Emily McKinney from segments found at the UW Map Library.



Figure 9: Aerial View of Madison, 2000. Pieced together by Emily McKinney from segments found at the UW Map Library.

Groceries in the trunk, I guide the car back towards downtown, away from the paved parking paradise. Downtown parking is a peculiar problem because of the severe lack of space on the isthmus. This is the focus of the Madison parking surveys of 1939 and 1954: the existing streets, lots and ramps are reaching capacity, so we need to figure out the best places to construct more.¹⁵ The 1954 survey in particular recommends a zoning ordinance to require that any new or majorly renovated buildings provide off-street parking in order to address future parking problems.¹⁶ The general ordinances for Madison in the same year required parking to be provided by places of public assemblage, such as a theater or auditorium, but by no other establishments.¹⁷ Both the general ordinances of 1967 and 1990, on the other hand, contain specific off-street parking requirements for non-residential districts outside of downtown, down to how many spaces certain types of buildings must have. For example, a bowling alley was required to have five parking spaces per lane, and amusement establishments, such as swimming pools and restaurants, had to provide a number of spaces equal to ten percent capacity.¹⁸

These ordinances encouraged the construction of more parking lots, which in turn encouraged automobile use, resulting in the isolation of the people driving them. The one-to-one ratio of parking lot to business provided a direct link from car to destination, deterring exploration of and interaction with the nearby city.¹⁹ Citizens see this one-to-one ratio favorably due to its ease, drawing more people from downtown to the park-able suburbs. Developers were not only inspired by the public's love of easy parking to turn vast amounts of land into parking spaces, but were required to. As of 2011, this code has been reversed. The new ordinance removes all minimums on parking for non-residential districts, and modestly reduces the maximums. The hope is that it will guide our city to develop in a "smarter way."²⁰ Perhaps by

reducing parking access, we can work on alternative transportation schemes to reduce automobile use, and prevent our city from turning into cement.

Although the changing ordinance may have assisted the reduction of parking lots outside of downtown, parking in the heart of Madison remains a problem, not only in terms of space, but also in terms of the environment. From the parking survey in 1954 to one released in 1978, the emphasis shifts from making as many parking lots as the public demands to adjusting our transportation system in order to reduce our parking use. Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc. sent two memorandums to the City of Madison, citing the recent “changing attitudes, standards, and concerns, with air pollution and the need for energy conservation,” and arguing that such concerns have put pressure on the building of new parking facilities. They suggested a two-fold strategy. They proposed creating an effective public transit system and encouraging car-pooling to accommodate long term parkers in the downtown area, and then alter the leftover long-term parking space into more attractive short-term parking. They also suggest a similar strategy as the 1954 Parking Survey: to develop parking facilities “in parallel with the construction of new retail, office, and other land-uses” in order to meet estimated demand. The study predicts that future parking usage will only grow.²¹ Accommodating this demand, however, may be problematic.

The parking to business ratio is a delicate balance, for a positive feedback loop exists: “Building additional parking lots causes more people to drive downtown, which requires the construction of more roadway, creating demand for yet more parking lots.”²² How much parking is enough in an ever-changing landscape? In the centralized downtown area alone, there are at least eight large parking garages, and many more lots and metered on-street parking. In 1958, the 73-year-old historic Dane County Courthouse building was demolished to create space for one of

those very parking ramps (see Figures 10 and 11).²³ The string of houses that have turned into apartments on West Washington have backyards, once green and inviting outdoor play, now filled with gravel and cars. We have traded in history and green space for storage space, and as the number of automobiles per household increases while Madison continues to sprawl outward, we will be facing more of the same: How much does parking mean to us?



Figure 10: "Dane County Courthouse (W.A.) record shot." November 17, 1956. From: Williams, *Double Take*, 128.



Figure 11: "Dane County Parking Ramp from the Steps of Saint Raphael Cathedral." November 20, 1999. From: Williams, *Double Take*, 129.

Parking means a lot. Its availability is important to the public, and its absence is seen as a crisis, an infringement on basic rights. From parents of college students and occasional downtown shoppers to downtown employees who look for a space every weekday, parking in Madison's core is seen as frustrating, time consuming, and sometimes expensive. Doug Moe, in a column for the *Wisconsin State Journal*, describes his parking exploits when he worked for *Madison Magazine* near the Capitol. "Back then, I suffered every parking indignity there was, and took it all very personally.... I was repeatedly ticketed and even 'booted,' in the dark days when a private parking security firm roamed the Downtown, extorting money from hapless car

owners.”²⁴ Moe, along with many others, see themselves as victims and believe that parking is a service that they are entitled to. Due to this perception of parking as a “free good,” which is encouraged by the endless free lots in the suburbs, people always want more parking.²⁵ Public meters and “meter maids,” who represent the government, are seen as the enemy. This “parking war” has even been turned into a reality TV show on A&E (called “Parking Wars”), signifying the public’s interest in parking and the struggles it entails.

While parking convenience is very important to the average Joe, it is thought of only in terms of ease, not as an instigator of global warming and community loss. It is, by itself, the last line of defense against the automobile. No matter how many cars are made, they are irrelevant if roads are not well planned to prevent congestion, or if the roads simply did not exist in the first place. Likewise, neither the car nor the road matters if there is no parking at the driver’s destination. The availability of parking determines whether or not the automobile is useful, which in turn allows people to be farther and farther away, promoting sprawl. The increased use of the car contributes both to the increased emission of greenhouse gases as well as the increased isolation in our society and loss of community. As we sprawl, automobile use will continue to increase, which will call for more parking, creating an endless cycle. We’ve given up historical buildings and backyards so far; what else are we willing to pave over for the sake of parking?

The tendency of our society is not to change a system we have had in place since the advent of the automobile. Although we are becoming aware of the implications of parking, we are simply tweaking this positive feedback loop. For example, a lot of work is being put toward sustainable parking lot technology and design, such as permeable pavements to reduce water runoff, lighter colored materials to reflect sunlight, more green landscaping, solar panels atop carports, and electric vehicle recharging stations.²⁶ These technologies may be helpful in the

future, but action must be taken to shift our reliance on the automobile over to communal transport. This choice is not just between the convenience of the car and global warming. It will affect how we interact with our neighbors, and what spaces we will have to interact in the first place. Our cities, our communities, and our Earth can no longer afford sprawl. By reducing parking availability and strengthening public transportation systems, people will make the choice themselves.

After my family and I drive back into the city, we illegally park on the wrong side of the street in order to unload my groceries. Luckily, we escape notice, and finally park permanently in the Lake Street lot, near the bottom of State Street. As we meander toward the Capitol on the strip, I window shop, popping into a few stores that display something that catches my eye. My younger brother insists that we take an ice cream break in Campus Candy, and we don't disagree. Buskers appear on the sidewalk every once in a while, filling the air with cheery music. I run into a few friends who are on their way from a café to the Historical Society, and I introduce them to my parents. I wish my family was staying until Saturday, so that I could take them to the Farmers' Market. As the afternoon sun warms our backs, I smile. It is moments like these that remind me of my love for downtown Madison, a city filled with bustling shoppers, neighborly chatter, bikers and walkers, and community; a place where parking lots are hidden from view, as if they don't exist.

¹ Andres Duany et al., *Suburban Nation* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), 138.

² “Daily and Half-Day Permits,” *UW Transportation Services*, http://transportation.wisc.edu/parking/Visitor_daily.aspx

³ “Parking Rates,” *City of Madison Parking Utility*, <http://www.cityofmadison.com/parkingUtility/rates.cfm>

⁴ “View from Main Hall (Bascom Hall) toward the Wisconsin State Capitol.” 1861. Photograph. Wisconsin Historical Society Collection: Fuller, John S.: Madison, Wisconsin, Panorama Photographs, 1861. Image ID: 10487.

⁵ Sanborn Map of Madison, WI. 1885. Sheet 7, from 509 to 301 State St. At this time, State Street had many buildings on it, but was not as compact as it would come to be.

Madison City Directory, 1917, State Street, 767-769. This was the first City Directory to list residents by name as well as by street. No publisher listed. The 1917 Directory listed many more residential names than storefronts.

Madison City Directory, (Milwaukee, WI: Wright Directory Co., Publishers, 1937), State Street, 991-994.

⁶ “Proposals : Madison Streetcar History,” *Downtown Trolley, Inc.* http://www.downtownrolley.org/proposals/index.php?category_id=1588&printable=1

⁷ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 17.

⁸ “To Do or Not to Do? Planning or Plodding? Design by Determination or Default?” M. Paul Friedberg & Associates press release, March 20, 1974, provided by Michael Brenneis, Technical Aide of the City of Madison Parking Utility.

⁹ Sanborn Map of Madison, WI. 1908. Sheets 53-54, from 701 Washington St. to cross street of Charter *Madison City Directory*, 1917, Regent Street, 759-760.

Madison City Directory, 1937, Regent Street, 973-975.

¹⁰ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 71.

¹¹ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 27.

¹² Wende Mix, PhD in Transportation Engineering, e-mail interview by Emily McKinney, November 5, 2012.

¹³ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 61.

¹⁴ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 115-133.

¹⁵ Ladislav Segoe for the Trustees of Madison Planning Trust, *Comprehensive Plan of Madison, Wisconsin, and Environs*, “Book XIII: Parking and Parking facilities in Central Business District” (Madison, WI: 1939).

¹⁶ The Traffic Engineering Department of the City of Madison, Wisconsin, *Parking Survey Report for the City of Madison, Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: 1954), 6.

¹⁷ The City of Madison, *Madison General Ordinances* (Madison, WI: 1954), section 16.28, 398-401.

¹⁸ The City of Madison, *Madison General Ordinances* (Madison, WI: 1967), section 28.11(3), 28.115-28.120

The City of Madison, *Madison General Ordinances* (Madison, WI: 1994), section 28.11(3), 28.122-28.128

¹⁹ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 167.

²⁰ Eric Sundquist, "Madison Reverses Code on Parking," *Planning* 77, no. 6 (July 2011): 6.

²¹ Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc. *Phase II Memorandum: Tasks II-I Through II-IV, Parking Demand*. Memorandum to: City of Madison (Madison, WI: July 19, 1978), 1-2, 46.

²² Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 162.

²³ "Courthouse Photos," *Dane County, Wisconsin Clerk of Courts*
<http://www.countyofdane.com/court/court/photos.aspx>

Zane Williams, *Double Take* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 128-129.

²⁴ Doug Moe, "It's like our very own 'Parking Wars,'" *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 12, 2009, Section A2, Final edition.

²⁵ Duany et al., *Suburban Nation*, 162.

²⁶ Wende Mix.