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Parking Master Plan at Georgia Southern University

Submitted by: Bruce Schulte

3/3/2003

Motion:

The Parking Plan should be reviewed by the SEC, Senate, and general faculty before implementation. Faculty are being excluded from input and the plan clearly affects the financial, physical, and aesthetic health of the community.

Rationale:

Action is being proposed to cut down wooded areas for increased parking (915 spaces) so students can be within 15 minutes of their cars. The proposed parking will cost \$2.4 million dollars and only provide enough spaces to accommodate growth to the size of 17,500 students. At this point (only a few years in the future based on projections), mass transit will be needed. Alternative solutions including mass transit should be sought NOW.

Response:

Ron Core (VPBF) introduced the presentation by noting that the campuswide physical master plan presented at Fall '02 convocation was not detailed enough re: parking, so that fall he asked Joe Franklin (Director of Auxiliary Services) and Bob Chambers (Director of Parking and Transportation) to develop a separate master parking plan, which they did in consultation with President Grube.

It is this plan that was first presented to the Campus Physical Planning Committee in late February, and subsequently to an open forum, at the General Faculty Meeting, to student groups, the Dean's Council, and to Student Affairs Directors. [Secretary's Note: Perhaps worn out by this itinerary, the Power Point presentation equipment quit and could not be persuaded to work again.

Joe Franklin was thereby forced to solo a cappella.] Franklin noted that construction of the IT building eliminated 354 spaces, and student dissatisfaction with parking was already high: the ACT survey report from Fall '01 rated it lower than any service on campus and lower than the national average (he noted parking is, however, a traditionally low-scoring service), they were receiving lots of complaints in the parking office, and President Grube was hearing complaints at community meetings. Hence the Master Parking Plan was conceived.

Two areas have critical over-demand:

Russell Union and the West End (Henderson Library to College of Education).

The West End has the biggest deficit of commuter spaces because of recent and current building re: Business, Technology, Education, Information Technology, and Nursing/Chemistry.

Franklin then presented a list of issues (without benefit of clarifying Powerpoint visuals): Library construction will eliminate 169 faculty/staff spots; these will be replaced re: shifting, for example putting 24 behind Lewis Hall and shifting 54 student slots to faculty/staff in the Education lot.

Dorman Hall will be torn down and its 142 spots turned commuter, which should make the Russell Union area okay.

Hanner area is okay.

West End needs several new lots; the first will be 300 at Forest Drive and Old Register Road. Franklin noted receiving much opposition re: cutting woods, but planned a 120 foot wooded border to obscure the lot. Re: aesthetics, the Engineering Technology lot will be moved back from the building and expanded; there will also be landscaping. re: Dorman Hall again, once gone its place will be taken by 118 commuter spaces. Herty Drive, from Georgia Avenue to Cone Hall, will become a pedestrian in Fall '03 (part of the plan to move traffic away from the center of campus). [Secretary's Note: pedestrians will be closed to regular traffic but allow use by service, emergency, and other such traffic.]

Franklin paused to note that the above changes would give sufficient parking for Fall '03. Without them, they might have to look for an alternative, like reducing demand. He then turned to Fall '04: Georgia Avenue, from Hollis to Russell Union, turned pedestrian. Herty lot removed, i.e. 34 faculty/staff spots gone. Hollis lot to be modified and landscaped, losing some spaces.

Franklin paused to note that he, too, was now becoming confused. Then he forged on: the serious and dangerous traffic at Russell Union will require lot entrance/exit and traffic pattern changes. 20 new faculty/staff spots behind Math/Physics. Lots of landscaping. For Fall '05, Forest Drive from Russell Union to Counseling Center turns pedestrian, causing the loss of Carruth lot and 41 faculty/staff spots at COBA/Newton. More landscaping. Fall '06, a new lot between Herty Pines (120 feet will separate Herty Pines from the lot) and the baseball field, re: faculty/staff and visitors (such as baseball fans). Allen (Moderator) asked if the plan were available for public study; Franklin noted its length and said copies would be available to read at the Library, the Parking office, and his own office. He also offered to sit down and talk about it with anyone for any time.

Chuck Johnson (COBA) suggested putting it on the web, noting how it could be done easily. Franklin noted that as a potentiality. Allen then asked biology professor Lorne Wolfe to speak for GSEN. Wolfe noted GSEN's particular concerns as the Herty Pines and Old Register proposed lots re: incalculable loss from forever destroying natural forests for a short-term parking fix. GSEN feels the plan was promulgated on inaccurate assumptions: With RAC and Paulson Stadium, there is abundant campus parking. Also, the plan's assumption that students must park within a "15 minute walk" of all their classes is incompatible with the proposed pedestrian-friendly campus.

GSEN offered four alternatives:

- Encourage students via incentives like PE credit to walk or bike to class.
- Create a mass transit system. This will be implemented apparently when this University reaches 17,000. Why not start it immediately, to minimize the growing pains of this new system?
- Offer carpoolers high quality parking options.
- As Franklin had mentioned elsewhere, offer more Friday classes to alter traffic patterns and therefore reduce the need for creating more lots. Wolfe noted student support for these initiatives via a blind survey he conducted earlier in the day of 144 students from across the campus. He offered six results: 46 percent did not know that they could park for free at Paulson Stadium or the RAC. 85 percent said they would use a mass transit system if it was coupled with free parking at the RAC or Paulson. 92

percent said they would carpool, especially if they would obtain a parking pass in a prime lot. 51 percent said they would be willing to leave their car at home and walk or bike if they got PE credit. The vast majority of students said all students are going to complain no matter what system they have unless they all have a dedicated lot beside every building. Not a single student had chosen GSU because of its parking. Wolfe also suggested the parking lot funds could be used to hire faculty; President Grube pointed out that Auxiliary funds cannot be applied to other University needs.

Carol Cornwell (CHHS) wanted to speak as a representative of the School of Nursing, which is about 250 students and 25 faculty, the majority of whom are women, to call for a closer look at the wetlands that are going to be destroyed, partly because of the natural habitat issues, but also because of the documented fact that sexual and other forms of assault occur on campuses in areas that are not well lit and that are on the periphery of campuses.

David Stone (COST) asked what, if any, studies have been done re: implementing a transit system with peripheral parking.

Franklin said the cost depended on the number of students being moved: A stopgap system moving 1,000 students would cost about \$12 per semester (paid by all students, not just the 1,000). To move 3,500, improvements to the Paulson lot, buying buses, etc. means about a \$2 million startup and \$700,000 per year (\$7 million more over ten years). And we don't know if or when we'll reach the 17,000 student point when transit is absolutely needed. Stone suggested we will reach that point some time; if we wait, we'll have to cut down every tree left to accommodate it. Franklin noted improvements to Paulson would be sufficient because the number of appropriate locations for parking lots has just about reached its end. Stone asked if Tech and UGA use transit; Franklin said they do via a mandatory transit fee for all students, which is what we would have to do; because it's HOPE eligible, this would be a hard sell in Atlanta right now. He believed the current plans to create more parking lots are an acceptable solution to the transit problem. Allen (Moderator) noted that Franklin had cited \$2.7 million for transit at the General Faculty meeting, but today had cited between \$7 and \$9 million. Franklin noted the lower figure was to move 1,000, the higher for 3,500.

David Robinson (CLASS) congratulated Parking on how well they've done so far on ridding the central area of campus of traffic. But he noted almost no alternatives to a "everybody drives and parks" method have been tried: He noted that if a person wants to bike some days and drive others, that person must still pay a full, every-day-of-the-year fee. He suggested trying systems that would encourage less

frequent use of cars, though that option would be open if needed. Robinson felt this would reduce demand for parking spaces. He called himself a fairly wacky extremist; often, he may be viewed on a bicycle. Franklin noted the philosophy Parking has used to date is “cheap parking for everyone,” not discouraging people from driving to campus via alternatives of which Parking is aware, like parking zones or higher fees.

Visiting faculty member Kathleen Comerford asked on what studies the 1,000/3,500 student systems and the cost projections for transit were based, and asked for clarification of the costs to students under the current system: What is the differential between the cited and forbidding \$7 million figure for transit and the cost figure for students re: parking? She noted her doctoral school charged a separate fee for parking, one for a bus pass. She also disagreed that current forest and wetland areas are appropriate places for parking lots.

Franklin tried to sort through her issues: The 1,000 students are in stadium area housing and could easily be required to use a bus; Parking computed how many buses, etc. to reach the \$2.7 million figure. The 3,500 students are these plus those in housing about a ten minute walk from the stadium; that’s \$7 million because more buses would be needed. All costs are re: service from Paulson to Education. Door-to-door or around town would be even more. An inaudible question prompted Franklin to say a mandatory transit fee charged to every student, rather than a separate and user-paid bus fare, would be our method of paying for transit. Spread over 15,000 students it would not cost each student much; for 1,000/3,500 only paying, it would be counter-productively prohibitively expensive.

President Grube noted, with trepidation, to the Senate that faculty are the second most important group on campus; students are #1. He noted two issues that were raised that he said fall within the purview of this Senate. The curriculum issue of rewarding students with class credit for walking or biking, and the issue of scheduling Friday afternoon classes to ease pressure on midweek peak-traffic hours. He noted 98% of students want “more parking spaces.” He also question how many people in the room including himself, would be willing to park at Paulson and be bused in to center-campus. [Secretary’s Note: Though no count was taken, President Grube noted late that a lot of hands were raised at this point.]

Krug asked how many buses we already own. Franklin said buses used for various events are rented by other campus entities, not Auxiliary Services; neither he nor VP Bleiken knew the cost.

Chuck Johnson (COBA) noted that 3,500 students paying a user-only fee would pay about \$100 each; an all-student mandatory fee would be quite low and eminently doable. [Secretary's Note: \$750,000 divided by 3,500 equals about \$215; divided by 15,000 equals \$50. Our current parking fee is \$54.] Johnson also agreed Friday afternoon classes would cut traffic; as current Friday afternoon classes show, students simply won't come to class. Susan Trimble (COE) noted many present had seen the Parking presentation several times and noted repeated themes: a search for alternatives, the offer of a short-term solution to a major long-term problem, and the lack of data showing that we need more parking right now. She asked about the timeline for considering the recent input from students and faculty, and implementing the parking plan.

President Grube replied that such input will be considered in the recommendation made by Bob Chambers, Joe Franklin, and VP Ron Core to the President's Cabinet, which must then decide the issue in the next couple of weeks. He also said students should not bear the cost alone. Cyr (CLASS) pointed out that faculty paid now to park on campus, and he assumed they would be treated in future the same as now, paying the same as and along with the students, including fee hikes.

President Grube had not heard that in the discussion, but would be glad if that's how faculty felt; it sounded to him like faculty were willing to share the burden. He expressed concern that an increased cost – in a year with no raises and a likely health care premium increase – could be absorbed by faculty, but would be huge for some of the lowest paid University employees. Krug (CLASS) noted many faculty have ridden buses, while many of our students have not; it would be a wonderful education for them. She said she was not being facetious. She noted also that the Statesboro Herald had recently alluded to bus transportation and the difficulty of change boxes; she noted University systems use passes, not change. She also suggested a sliding fee scale for non-faculty employees. She then noted the rarity of people actually asking her to talk, but the following remark had been requested: She suggested "no raises" should mean "no higher fees" if our campus controls those fees, as with parking. She added that no trees are "incidental," tests will get students to Friday classes, and walking would aid the health of pear-shaped students and imminently diabetic faculty. She had noted earlier that she herself uses a lot of moisturizer. As he was recognizing John Brown (COBA), Allen (Moderator) noted his desire to bring this discussion to closure. Brown agreed and suggested immediate conclusion because of the late hour and other important issues still on the agenda. Allen said he was not ready to stop right away and asked if there were further questions.

Mike Nielsen (CLASS) recalled the video shown at Fall Convocation and discussion of coordinating the campus and the Statesboro community re: traffic. He asked how that coordination was progressing. President Grube mourned the Power Point machine's demise, noting that the Fall video predated the revised parking plan pictures that would have been shown, so there would have been changes apparent. He cited Bob Chambers and Joe Franklin's expertise in the practical day-to-day, operational-level issue of parking, and that for Auxiliary Services – unlike in a classroom – students are customers. Purely on-campus changes re: traffic and parking we handle internally; anything involving off-campus issues is the subject of thorough communication with the city. He praised Franklin, Chambers, and VP Core for putting forward a proposal for consideration, and said the responses have brought many good points forward. Nielsen couldn't figure out how HOPE impeded a transit system here, since other campuses have HOPE as well as transit. President Grube fielded this question, noting that Moderator Allen had asked him to be brief: HOPE can be used or all mandatory fees, so there's always pressure to keep such fees within that amount, partly because each year we only get a fraction of what we ask for re: even those mandatory fees. Allen thanked all concerned and concluded discussion