To: Alpena DDA
From: Brad Strader, PTP, MKSK Studios
Date: June 6, 2016
Subj: Draft observations of downtown circulation and parking

MKSK Studios, along with the Chesapeake Group is part of the LSL Planning team that was asked to provide some recommendations for downtown Alpena. Our work is through our role as advisors for the MEDC's Redevelopment Ready Community Program. This memo outlines our thoughts about the downtown transportation and parking.

MKSK Studios and the rest of the consulting team have down downtown plans, market studies, economic development strategies, parking and circulation plans for many small towns in Michigan and other states. Our thoughts below are based on that experience along with observations, street measurements, and discussions during our recent visit to Alpena.

As noted previously, this is a fairly general analysis. A more detailed evaluation would require new turning movement counts at the signalized intersections during the AM and PM peak hours for typical traffic days. Those figures could be used in a computer simulation model such as "Synchro" that would estimate the future delays, outline the most efficient traffic signal timing, help identify how long the turn bays should be based on the number of turns etc. This type of analysis by a traffic engineer would give a higher degree of confidence before making changes. In addition, if the city wishes to pursue a conversion of the MDOT segments of 2nd and 3rd Streets to two-way, they may require that type of analysis by one of the MDOT pre-qualified firms. (If the city pursues that, we can help identify qualified firms for you).

The goal for us was to evaluate changes to the circulation system that might be better in terms of downtown business vitality, improve walkability, retain or add parking and provide acceptable traffic flow. We will be preparing a more comprehensive report but wanted to get you some additional interim materials for your DDA meeting.

Our findings and ideas:

1. Typically one-way streets generally have higher capacity (more traffic can be processed per minute of green time at traffic signals, traffic speeds are a bit higher), and may allow more on-street parking. One-way streets may allow deliveries from the street since traffic has another lane to travel around a stopped delivery truck. One-way streets are generally thought to have a negative impact on businesses, especially in towns with a high volume of visitors/tourists like Alpena.

2. Two-way streets typically have lower capacity (less green time per let at the traffic signals because traffic enters the intersection from 4 legs instead of 3), may have a few more crashes and often mean less on-street parking (because of the need to have turn lanes and clear zones near the intersections). If delivery trucks are from the street, it can block traffic. So understanding how businesses receive deliveries is important. The prevailing attitude these days is that 2-way traffic is much better for businesses because it is easier for shoppers to navigate. Thus many cities are converting one-way streets to two-way and few are converting two-way to one-way.

3. The limited traffic volumes data we have seen indicates traffic counts in the city are less than years ago when the streets were converted to one-way. Current traffic volumes in the city and the width of the street support converting the one-way streets to two-way. The attached drawings illustrate generally how that could be laid out and the resulting on-street parking. We are showing short left turn bays on the north and south legs of 2nd and 3rd Streets at Chisholm.

4. If the city pursues conversion of 2nd and 3rd Streets, in my opinion it would be sensible to do this for both the city and MDOT segments of the street. This would be less confusing to the public. It would also be more cost effective than changing the traffic signals once, then doing it again if the MDOT segments are changed later. I suggest a discussion with MDOT to obtain their input on how to proceed with that option. Perhaps such a meeting could be scheduled with MDOT and the city engineer when we are next in Alpena.

5. My general opinion is that it would be easier to make a change to two-way after Labor Day so that the local residents and businesses can become familiar with the change before the next tourist season. That also would give the city time to work on the signal timing and design details before the peak traffic time of the year.

6. While closing off Carter Street has been suggested, we recommend it remain open. It could though be just westbound to help reduce conflicts at the intersection with 2nd and Water Street. Keeping Carter open gives an option to River Street (helpful if angled parking is added) and would help distribute traffic. If Carter were narrowed as a one-way or removed as a through street, the parking lots on either side could be reconfigured to add a bit more parking. The choices probably need more discussion.

7. We noticed many people crossing Chisholm at mid-block instead of at the signalized intersections. One idea to make that crossing safer would be to add in short pedestrian crossing islands in between 1st and 2nd and also between 2nd and 3rd Streets. These could be added because there are no driveways that require a left turn lane (i.e. the left turn lanes are longer than needed). This could be done as a seasonal (summer) design with well-marked crossings and signs that instruct motorists to yield to pedestrians. This would require MDOT approval.

8. We took a look at ways to add parking through reconfiguration of some of the parking lots and also a conversion of the north side of River Street to back-in angled parking. Back in angled parking almost doubles the number of spaces along that 200 feet or so. This type of parking is safer than regular angled because it is easier to back out. It has become more and more common in the last decade, in places such as Vancouver, Seattle, Tuscon AZ, Indianapolis, Columbus, Akron OH and many more. I worked on a project in 2015 in Findlay Ohio where we added back-in angled parking to a side street similar to River Street and it has been well received. But even though the entering maneuver is similar to parallel parking, some motorists find it difficult. Recently the village of Paw Paw in Southwest Michigan removed this type of angled parking after complaints during a trial period. (a sample brochure that explains this type of parking is attached). We are showing these spaces as very wide, 12 feet instead of the usual 10 feet. This extra width will make it easier for people to negotiate the backing maneuver. Over time, the width could be reduced as it becomes more familiar, so that a few extra spaces could be added.

So that is our preliminary set of recommendations. We will be happy to discuss this once you have a discussion with the city administration and the DDA.