



WALKER
CONSULTANTS

City of Saugatuck, MI

Wayfinding, Signage, and Communication Evaluation

April 2026



1. Introduction

Effective wayfinding, signage, and communication are essential for enhancing visitors' experiences in any downtown area. Clear and informative signage not only guides individuals to their desired destinations but also promotes a sense of safety and comfort. Well-designed wayfinding systems can significantly reduce confusion and frustration, helping visitors find available parking and navigate the area easily.

Saugatuck attracts many visitors during the summer months. By prioritizing clear communication through effective signage, Saugatuck can enhance the overall visitor experience, promote local businesses, and create a welcoming environment for everyone.

The following evaluation assesses the current state of wayfinding and signage in Saugatuck, identifying opportunities for improvement that will contribute to a more cohesive and enjoyable experience for both visitors and residents alike.

2. Current Conditions Assessment

Existing Sign System

Observation 1: A Limited Amount of Arrival and Directional Signage at the Entry Points into the City.

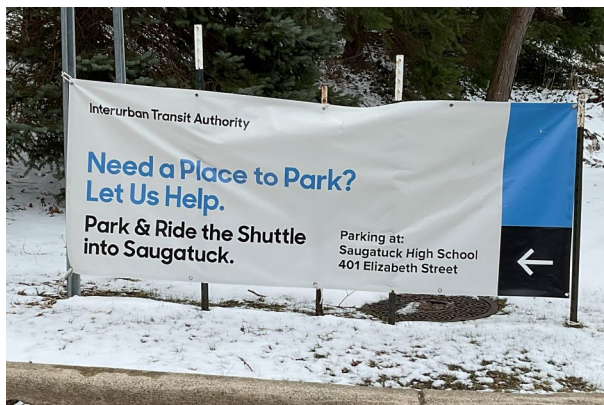
The current arrival signage does not effectively create a welcoming atmosphere and does not enhance the character or sense of place for visitors entering the City. Additionally, while the sign at Blue Star Highway serves as a noticeable gateway, there is no directional sign indicating a left turn into downtown.



Top left: The current gateway sign at the intersection of Blue Star Highway and Lake Street is an important decision point for entering downtown, but it lacks any directional messaging. Top right: As visitors enter the City on Lake Street, this is the only sign indicating that they are entering downtown, and it lacks a sense of arrival. Bottom: The current entry sign on Holland Street is a typical street sign and lacks any aesthetic qualities or character representative of Saugatuck.

Observation 2: Lack of Vehicular and Pedestrian Directional Signage in Downtown.

The only vehicular directional signage in downtown pertains to shuttle parking at the high school; there is no additional signage to guide drivers to other destinations. This lack of guidance can create a negative experience for infrequent or first-time visitors. Without clear signage, drivers must rely on navigation on their mobile phones or vehicle systems to reach their destinations, which could lead to conflicts with pedestrians, especially during peak times. While there are some pedestrian-oriented directional signs, such as map kiosks, they are limited to the south side of the city. There are no signs at parking locations or downtown, making it challenging for visitors to navigate the area after parking.



Top Left: There is no vehicular directional sign at the key decision point located at the intersection of Culver Street and Butler Street downtown. Top Right: There is no pedestrian directional sign at the decision point at the intersection of Butler Street and Hoffman Street. Bottom Left: This shows the current directional sign for the park-and-ride. Bottom Right: These are the existing map kiosks located at the southern end of downtown.

Observation 3: No Clear Parking Identification Signage at Public Parking Facilities

Currently, some public parking facilities have identification signs, but these signs often lack facility names or parking-related information and are too small to determine whether the facilities are available for public use when searching for parking. Providing clearer, larger information can enhance the overall visitor experience and reassure drivers that where they are parking is available for public parking.



Top Left: This is the only documented parking identification sign downtown indicating public parking. However, it is too small to read easily and lacks information about facility identification and time restrictions. Top Right: There are no signs at the facility's entrance indicating that this lot is available for public parking. Bottom: This area is part of the on-street parking inventory downtown, but because of its location and layout, it could easily be mistaken for private parking. Currently, there are no signs indicating that these spaces are designated for public parking, not even on-street signage.

Observation 4: Excessive Clutter of On-Street Parking Signs

The on-street parking signage has too many signs and too much information, making it difficult for visitors to find what they need.

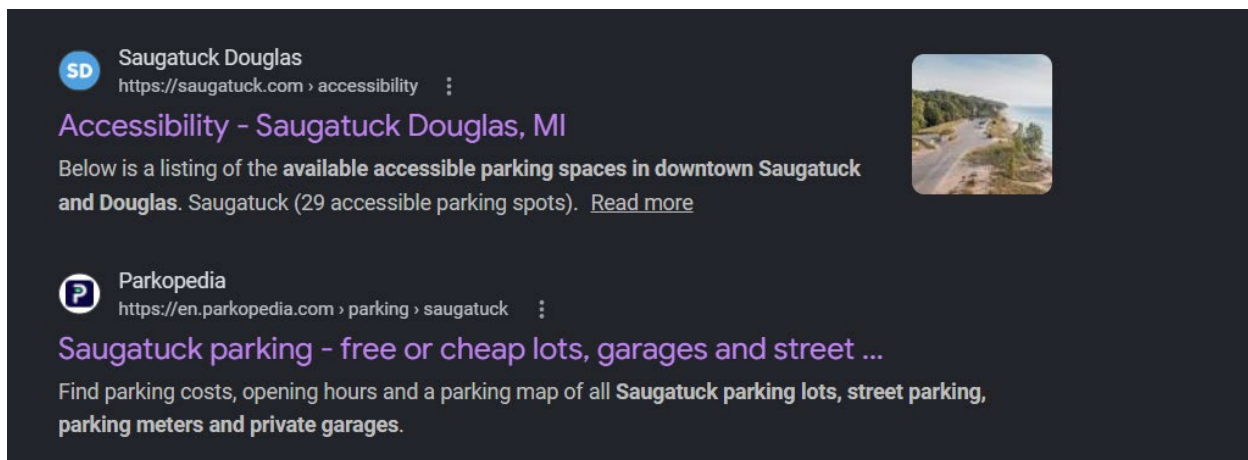


The images above show examples of on-street parking signs and the information they provide. The numerous signs and information can make it hard to understand, which may discourage people from parking or lead to negative perceptions during their visit to Saugatuck.

Parking and Transportation Communications

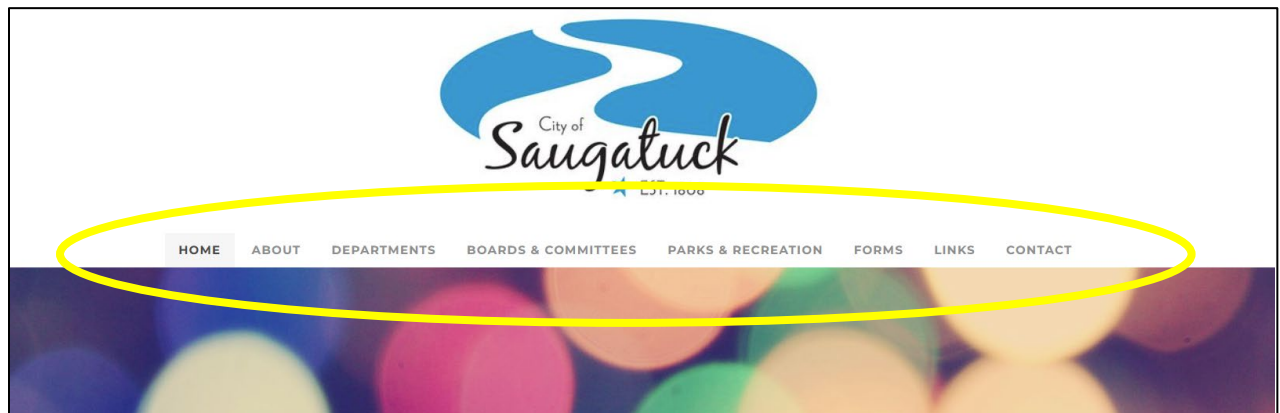
When people visit a city for the first time, they often look for online recommendations regarding restaurants, attractions, and parking options. By providing clear, easily accessible parking information on their websites, cities can significantly reduce the stress newcomers or infrequent visitors may experience.

Currently, the City of Saugatuck's website does not provide any information about public parking. In fact, when searching online for parking, the City of Saugatuck does not appear among the top results. Instead, websites like Parkopedia, Saugatuck Douglas Accessibility Parking, Yelp, and Tripadvisor dominate the search results for parking-related information.



Above: An example screenshot of the top results when searching for parking information in Saugatuck.

As noted earlier, parking information is not easily accessible on the City's website. Below is a screenshot of the current homepage. The homepage lacks any information or messaging about parking. Only after conducting a search can one find the Parking Improvements Task Force, which still does not provide any parking-related information for viewing.



3. Recommended Improvements

Signage and Wayfinding Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Install Updated Gateway and Directional Signage at City's Entrances

To improve visibility at key decision points and city entrances, Walker recommends installing updated gateway and directional signage at the intersections of Blue Star Highway and Lake Street, and of Holland Street, North Street, and Riverside Drive. These locations serve as the primary entry points into downtown Saugatuck.

Blue Star Highway and Lake Street Entry Point



The city should consider the following updates:

- A. Update the existing Saugatuck Gateway Sign to be consistent with the existing City branding and improve overall visibility by providing more modern materials for better readability and to include more welcoming messaging.
- B. Install directional signage with arrows to guide drivers left into downtown.

Below are examples of Gateway Signs and Directional Signage at downtown entrances.



Top Left: This is an example of a gateway sign for Douglas, MI. It features messaging for downtown and includes a directional arrow at a key decision point on Blue Star Highway. Top Right: This example shows a vehicular directional sign that provides arrows and downtown messaging, indicating that drivers should turn right to enter downtown.



Top Left: This is an example of a gateway sign in Holland, MI. The sign features welcoming messages and design elements that reflect the city's history. It is also highly visible. Image Source: <https://guidestudio.com> Top Right: This is an example of directional signage located at a key decision point in Holland, MI.

Recommendation 2: Develop a Sign System that includes Vehicular and Pedestrian Directional Signage within the Downtown

In any downtown area, an effective signage system is essential for improving navigation and enhancing the overall experience for both pedestrians and drivers. Walker recommends creating a comprehensive signage system that addresses the needs of both vehicles and pedestrians, ensuring safety, clarity, and ease of movement. Below is an example of various sign types from Winter Haven, FL. These sign types include gateway signs, vehicular directional signs, pedestrian directional signs, parking directional signs, and parking identification signs.



The images below provide other examples of how vehicular and pedestrian directional signage could look.



Establishing a uniform naming system would create consistency and continuity in marketing and communicating the available parking options to visitors and residents. For instance, all publicly available parking facilities could be labeled as A, B, C, 1, 2, or 3, or have some directional or geographical connections. This would enhance wayfinding to these facilities on the City's website and through physical signage in and around downtown. Below are examples of how other municipalities have applied a naming convention to their parking facilities.



The example above shows a parking map and a list of parking facilities in Lynchburg, VA. The city has assigned names for the facilities based on their locations and designated use.



Recommendation 4: Design and Install Parking Identification Signs at the Entrances of all Publicly Available Parking Facilities

As mentioned in Recommendation 2, which would include parking identification signs, there needs to be greater emphasis on parking signage overall. Currently, there are no signs indicating the names of parking facilities or their availability for public use. Walker recommends that clear parking identification signs be designed and installed at all publicly accessible parking facilities.

Each sign should feature the facility's name, be consistent with the City's naming convention as discussed in Recommendation 3 and clearly indicate whether the facility is available for public parking. Additionally, the signs should outline any specific parking restrictions for that facility. Below are examples of best practices for implementing effective parking identification signs throughout the City.

Parking identification sign examples



Recommendation 5: Simplify and Consolidate Messaging for On-Street Parking Signage

It's important to keep messaging clear and concise while providing necessary directions and information. Overloading signs with too much information can confuse visitors who may not be parking experts, leading to frustration and compliance issues. Walker recommends consolidating on-street parking signs to a maximum of two: one sign for parking-related time limits and another for additional restrictions, such as prohibiting trailers.

Existing On-Street Signage



Below are examples of on-street signs with simple and clear messaging.



Left: An example of a parking sign displaying time restrictions and the parking symbol "P." Right: An example of on-street parking signage that includes permitted information, which could apply to the restrictions of trailers in Saugatuck.

Recommendation 6: Install Additional Map Kiosks at Every Pedestrian Exit Point of Each Parking Facility

Currently, map kiosks are located in the southern part of downtown, as shown below. Walker recommends installing similar kiosks at other locations throughout downtown, particularly at pedestrian exit points of public parking facilities.



Recommendation 7: Update and Add More Social District Signs Downtown.

Currently, there are only a few social district signs, especially at the entry and exit points, as shown below. Walker recommends adding more of these signs to improve communication for visitors exploring downtown, particularly at district entrances and exits. In addition, Walker recommends enhancing the maps on the social district signs by including more context and reference points to aid in wayfinding. Furthermore, Walker recommends providing additional messaging options, such as vinyl sidewalk stickers.

Existing Social District Signs in Saugatuck



Below are examples of how other municipalities have implemented Signage and Messaging for Social Districts.



Recommendation 8: Install Shared Parking Signage at The High School.

Currently, the high school offers parking during peak times to accommodate the shuttle service to and from downtown. This service is available only during specific times of the year. Walker recommends installing permanent shared parking signage, which clearly indicates the designated parking areas and the months during which parking is allowed. This will eliminate confusion about when and where visitors can park and prevent them from parking in restricted areas or during non-peak times.

Below are examples of how other municipalities have implemented Shared Parking Signage.



Parking and Transportation Communication Recommendations

Recommendation 9: Improve Visibility and Enhance Usability of Online Parking Resources on the City's Website

Improving the visibility of online parking resources involves making parking information easier to find and more accessible. This can be achieved through clearer navigation and more prominent placement on relevant platforms. Enhancing usability is crucial to ensure that users can easily navigate these resources, quickly locate parking options, and obtain the necessary information. The overall goal is to create a user-friendly experience that helps individuals efficiently find and utilize parking services online.

Signage alone is not enough. The City would also benefit from a continuous public relations program to effectively communicate parking opportunities and regulations.

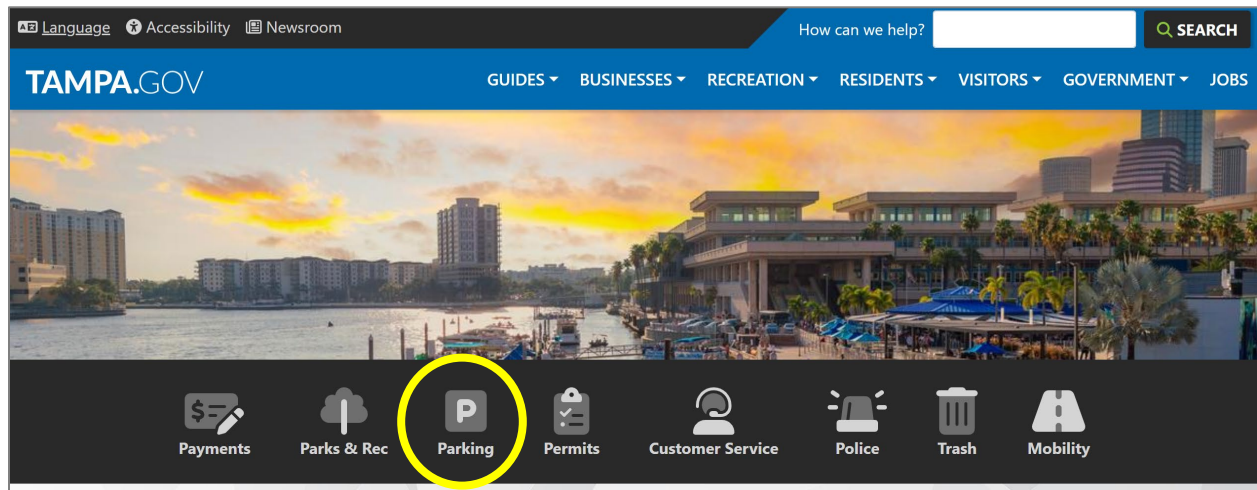
As mentioned earlier, the City currently lacks a dedicated website or webpage for downtown parking. To address this, the City should not only create a dedicated downtown parking website but also develop public parking brochures, maps, and other relevant information. This content should be made available on a dedicated parking webpage that aligns with the physical signage recommended for the downtown area.

In addition, Walker recommends the following strategies related to parking and transportation communication:

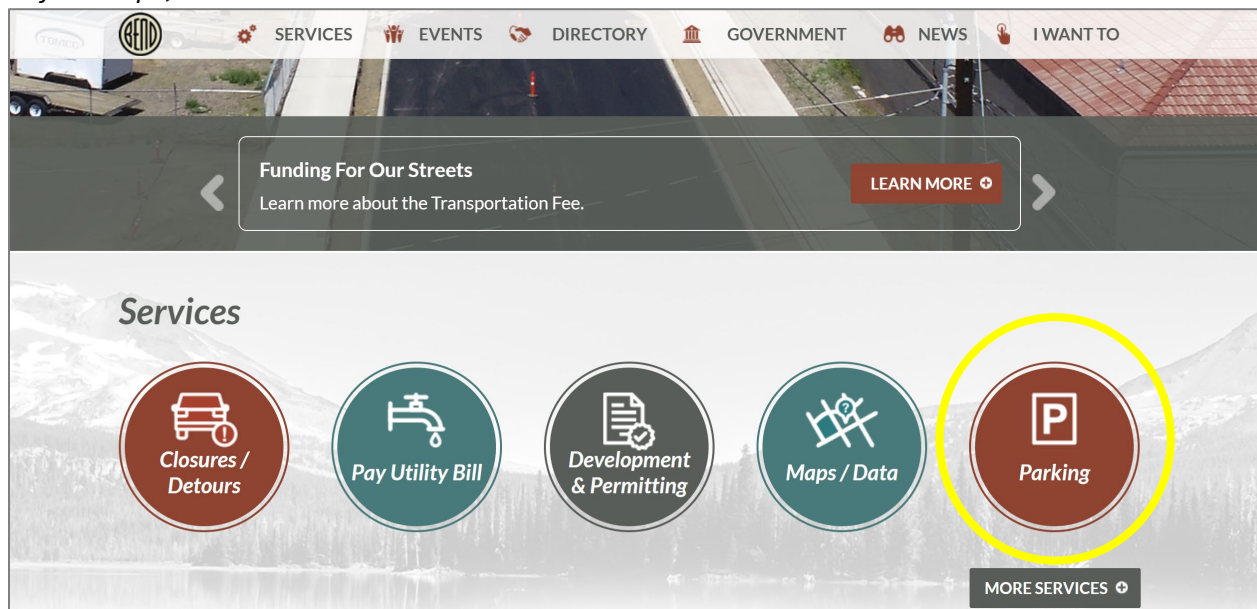
- Create a dedicated parking page on the city's website and add a parking icon or link on the city's homepage.
- Feature an interactive parking map directly on the parking page to ensure clear and accurate communication of all parking information, eliminating reliance on third-party websites.
- Include descriptions of each parking facility and on-street parking spaces on the interactive map. This information should include:
 - The facility's address
 - A picture of the entrance or street
 - The number of ADA spaces available
 - Details about EV charging stations, if applicable
 - Provide descriptions for each parking facility to highlight the most convenient parking options for specific destinations or events.
- Regularly share information related to public parking and its availability, including options for remote parking and shuttle services, through various platforms such as popular websites and social media.

The following are still images of home pages, dedicated parking pages, and interactive parking maps from other cities.

Website Home Landing Page Examples

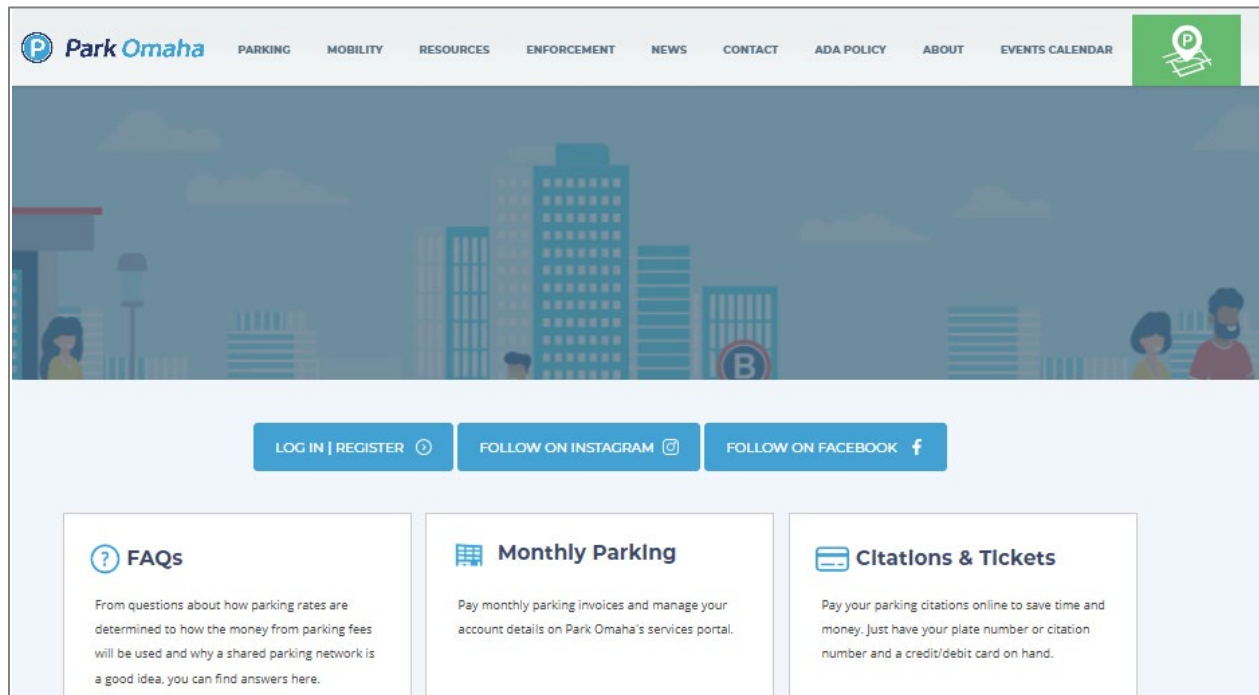


City of Tampa, FL

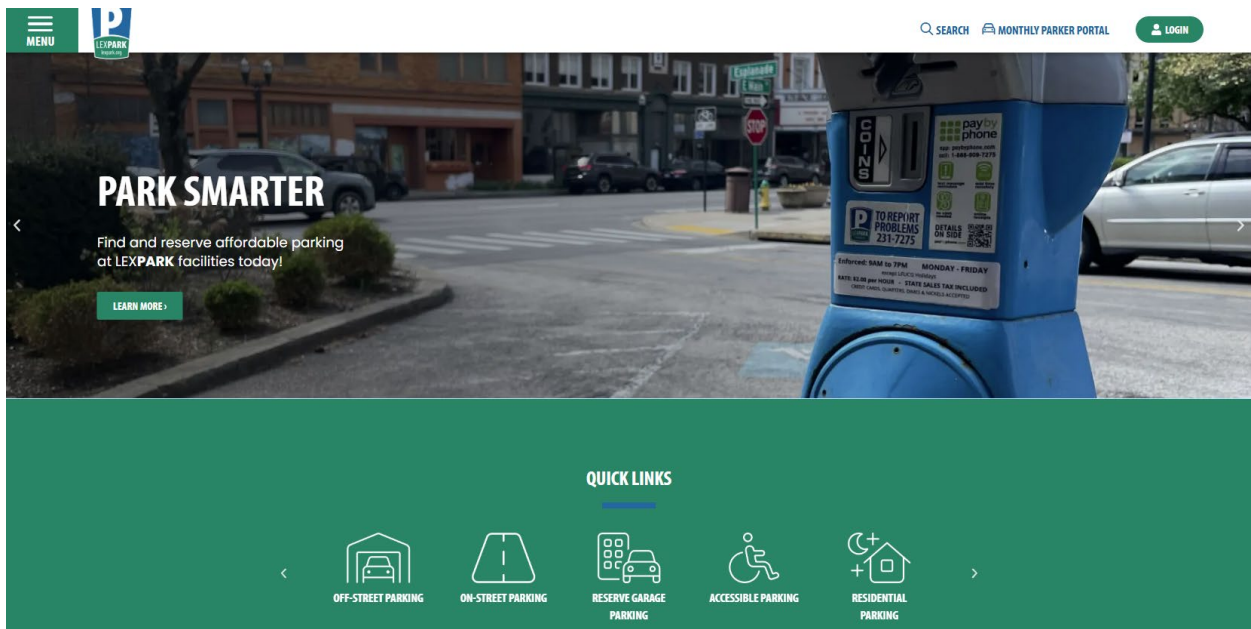


City of Bend, OR

Dedicated Parking Page Examples



City of Omaha, NE

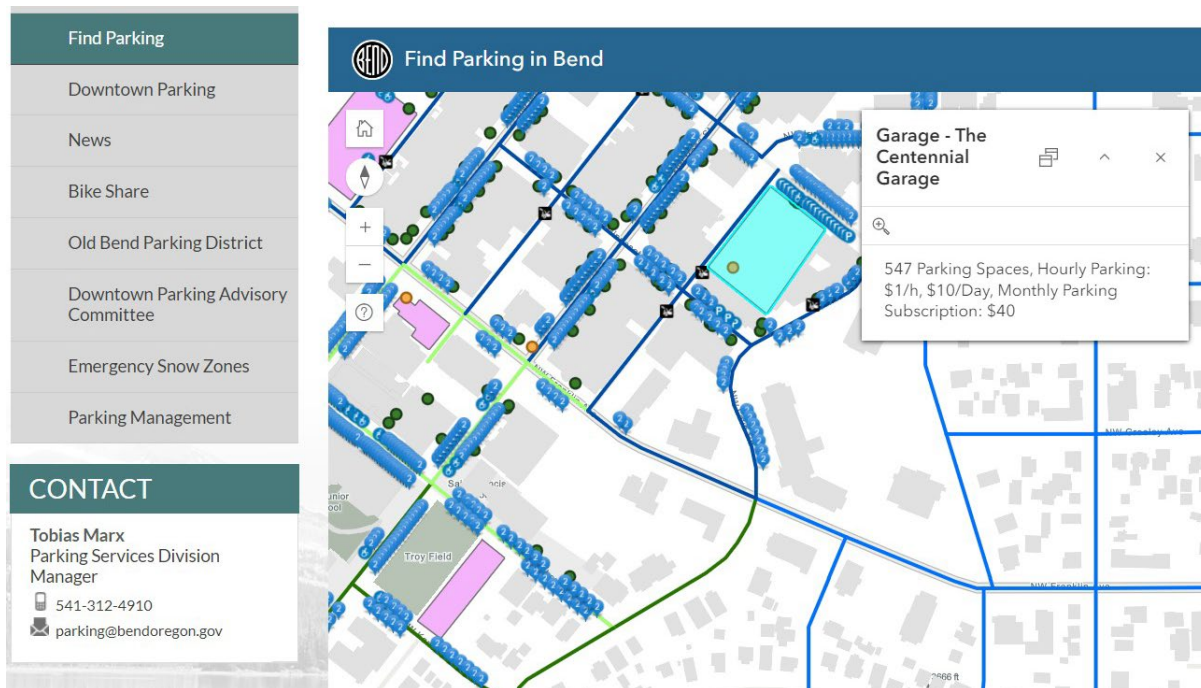


City of Lexington, KY

Interactive Map Examples



City of Minneapolis, MN



City of Bend, OR



WALKER
CONSULTANTS