

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

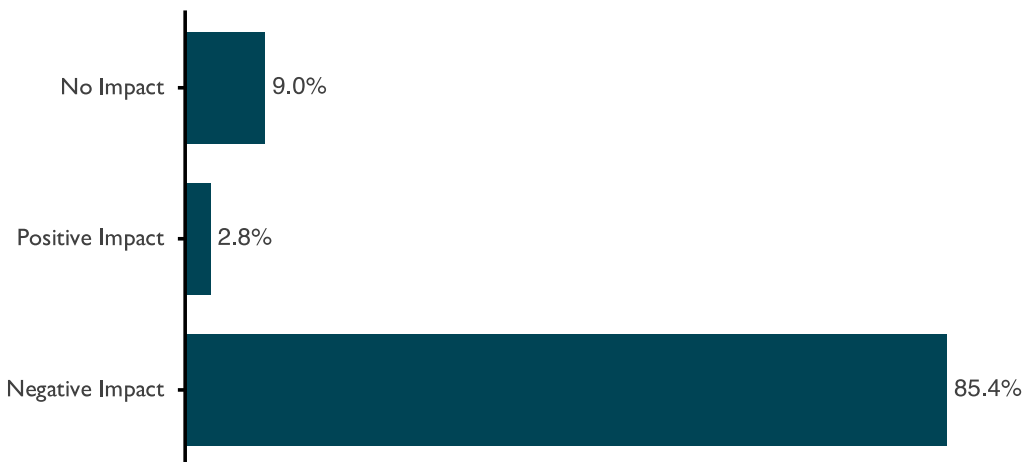
Strong majority oppose ending the city’s nights and weekends parking policy. Overall, survey respondents are highly supportive of the City of Knoxville’s current parking policy, which allows for free parking on nights and weekends. In total, more than 14,800 respondents (97 percent) “strongly oppose” ending the city’s current parking policy. Opposition to ending the city’s current parking policy is consistent across subgroups, with 97 percent of downtown employees and 94 percent of downtown residents indicating their opposition.

Question: As you may know, the City of Knoxville is considering changes to its current parking policies. The city is considering doing away with free parking on nights and weekends. This could mean residents, employees and visitors would have to pay to park in city-run lots and garages 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Do you favor or oppose ending the city’s current policy of free parking on nights and weekends?



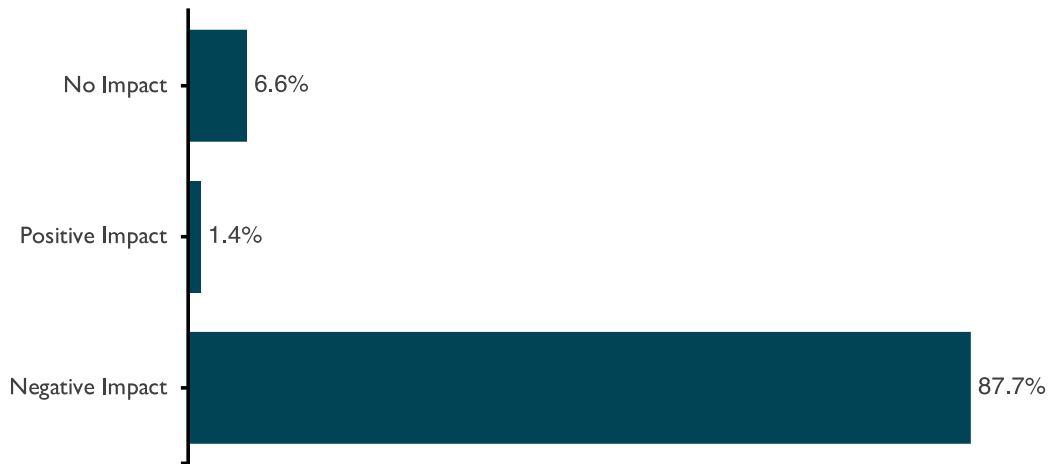
Among the 212 respondents who indicated they were a downtown business owner, 95 percent either strongly or somewhat oppose ending the city’s policy of free parking on nights and weekends, compared to 5 percent in favor. Downtown business owners broadly agreed that ending the city’s current parking policy would have a negative impact on the number of people who patronize their business as well as on their ability to attract and retain new employees.

Question: Do you think ending the Free Nights & Weekends policy would have an impact on your ability to retain and/or attract new employees? (Downtown Business Owners ONLY)



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding or excluded responses.

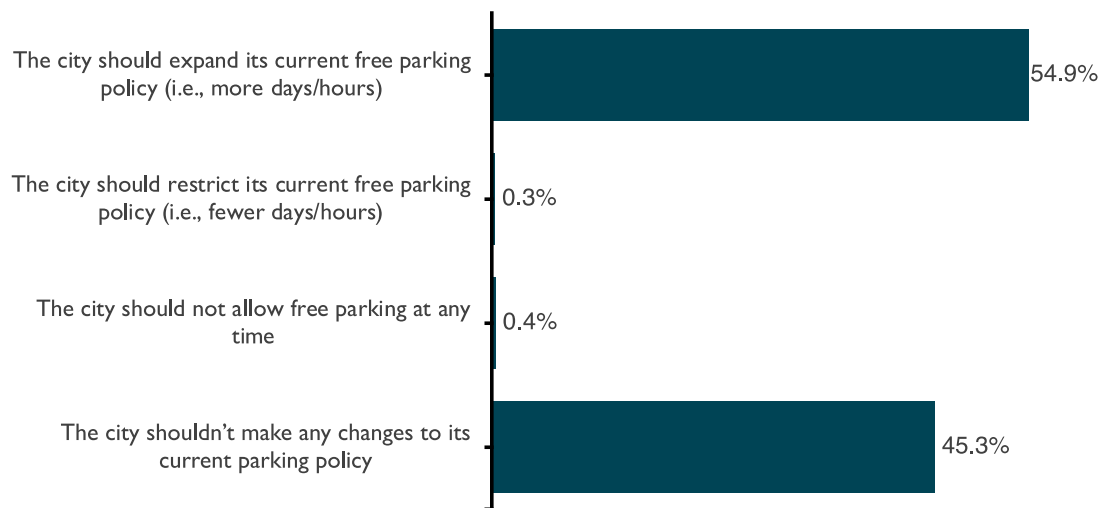
Question: Do you think ending the Free Nights & Weekends policy would have an impact on the number of people who patronize your business? (Downtown Business Owners ONLY)



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Respondents are more split over changes to parking policy. 54 percent of survey respondents believe the city should expand its current parking policy (i.e., more days/hours of free parking), while 45 percent say the city shouldn't make any changes to its current policy. Less than 1 percent believe the city should further restrict (i.e., fewer days/hour of free parking) or eliminate free parking entirely.

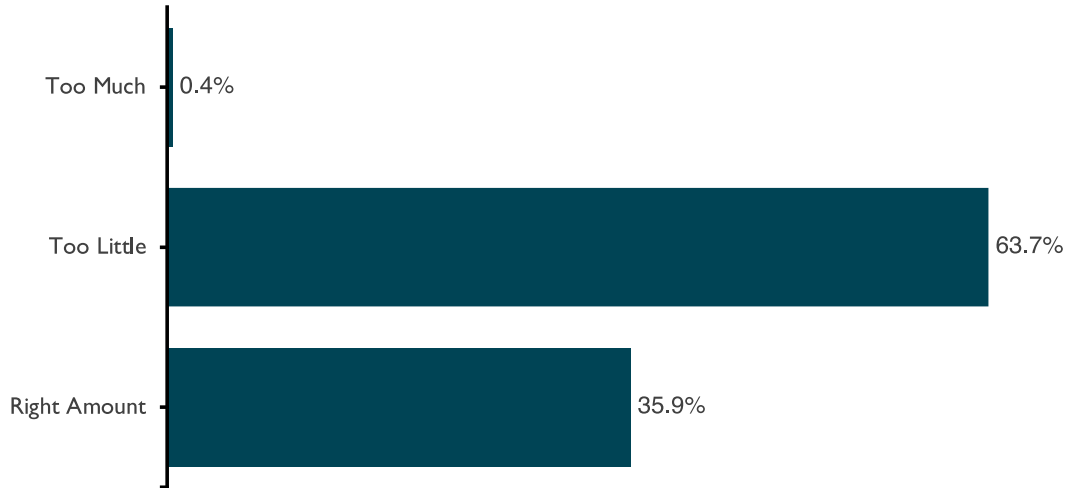
Question: Which statement comes closest to your own view?



Support for expanding the city's free parking policy is strongest among downtown business owners (59 percent), downtown employees (60 percent), and downtown residents (61 percent). Notably, only a slim majority – 52 percent – of downtown patrons favor expanding the city's free parking policy, compared to 47 percent who believe the city shouldn't make any changes to its current policy.

Majority say downtown doesn't have enough parking. 64 percent of respondents say downtown has too little parking, while 36 percent say downtown has the right amount of parking. Less than 1 percent say downtown has too much parking. These results are consistent across all subgroups, including downtown business owners, employees, and residents.

Question: Generally speaking, would you say there is too much, too little, or the right amount of parking in and around downtown Knoxville?



Featured Open Responses

Names are redacted for downtown business owners and employees.

“Free downtown parking after 6 pm on weekdays and on weekends is a draw for me. I know I can attend evening events downtown and not have the additional expense of parking fees.” – Bonny, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“We are supporters of the Knoxville Symphony, Opera, and other venues. While attending these events we also have dinner, shop, and usually have drinks after the event. Adding a parking fee on top of the ticket prices would most likely cause us to end our support of the entertainment venues as well as the restaurants and bars as we would stop visiting downtown completely. Having free weekend and weeknight parking is an amenity which should not be ended. Don't ruin a good thing! – Dana, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“One of the best recruiting tools for evening businesses downtown is the free parking for employees. I've left previous jobs due to parking issues. I have employees that have left other cities due to the cost of parking and believe(as a native Knoxville) it would be detrimental to downtown. Think 1990's when it was rare that anyone came downtown past 6pm.” – Downtown Business Owner

“I am a downtown resident who pays a monthly fee for parking. I visit many other cities and pay for parking. Free parking is a luxury and I don't see any long term impacts to visitation. I see added revenue for operating and maintaining the parking garages. There could be a special program for downtown hospitality employees like for downtown residents.” – WM, Downtown Resident

“Downtown Knoxville's free parking encourages me to more frequently and readily patronize businesses and attend events in the area. It is a point of pride for me as a native Knoxville that the city provides free parking in spacious, quality garages.” – Kenneth, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“As an employee of a downtown business, I have to pay daily to park for my job. This cost adds up and I feel is very unfair as a resident and employee in Knoxville. I understand that some parking needs to be paid but I do also think there should be free parking options available in different locations, especially for those of us that work downtown.” – Downtown Employee

“Performers in the downtown area rely on free parking. Doing away with it means numerous performers who create the events that tourism and local business rely on to increase foot traffic and make the city attractive to college students, professionals, and artists will no longer be drawn to downtown. They will go elsewhere and downtown can't survive that. People will just stop coming in favor of going somewhere they don't have to pay.” – Downtown Employee

“Working downtown throughout the week, I already spend a significant chunk of my hourly pay on parking. If I were to have to also pay later in the day and the weekend, I would lose even more of my already tight income. Unless there is a solution for people who work downtown, getting rid of free parking would be legitimately detrimental. I already cannot afford to park anywhere convenient, and that would break me.” – Downtown Employee

“As a resident who lives very close to downtown but not close enough to walk, the free parking amenities make me more likely to visit downtown on my nights and free time during the weekends, it is one of my favorite parts about Knoxville that there is so much available parking for free. I feel that this new policy would deter many Knoxville citizens from going downtown on nights and weekends in which this loss of commerce would far outweigh any gain from charging for parking 24/7.” – Luke, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“Consumers will adjust to paying for parking like they do in every major city. The city does not need more spaces, but needs to invest in marketing and communications to educate the public about the insane amount of public garages we already have across the downtown area. We could use the money from the parking location to improve the parking, lighting, and downtown infrastructure surrounding the parking experience. This funds could also go into improving other

rapidly expanding areas outside the CBID area like North Knoxville. Old North is in dire need of public parking.” – Downtown Business Owner

“I live in Oak Ridge and am always grateful for the free parking when visiting downtown. It's a small piece of financial relief to know that I don't have to worry about how much it will cost for me to park my car while I visit and enjoy downtown restaurants and stores. When I have visited other downtown areas that do not offer free parking, I am reminded of how nice it is to live near a city that does. I hope this policy does not change. I think it is one of the many wonderful things about our downtown area.” – Shelby, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“Removing free parking and a barrier of entry for people visiting downtown as often as they can. Especially on weekends. If there's no longer free parking, obviously less people will visit local bars/restaurants. Basically slowing down the local economy.” – Downtown Business Owner

“As a theater troupe who works downtown, every other weekend, if not every weekend. We rely HEAVILY on free parking especially since we only get paid tips to perform at various Venues and functions.” – Downtown Employee

“My clients schedule their appointments around free nights and weekends, and I would certainly lose 20% of my clients immediately if they had to pay to park.” – Downtown Business Owner

“The hundreds of people who work downtown and keep Knoxville's economy growing will be done a disservice if free parking is eliminated. Of all things, these workers do not need to worry about paying for parking when getting to work. Transportation fees have gone up all around, including gas and car prices, as well as rent as we all know, while wages have not risen to March these price increases. This will be another burden unfairly put on struggling workers in the city. This will be seen as unnecessary and will be an extremely unpopular decision if enacted.” – Downtown Employee

“I am excited about the new stadium. But when the baseball stadium is done and events are there it will strongly impact people coming downtown for general shopping because they will not want to battle the parking and traffic. We greatly need another parking garage down towards the Old City area. They have just announced the Jackson Avenue lot will become a hotel so will be under construction for a couple years. It was reported it will have a garage that will be open to public. But I'm sure will be expensive. It is a huge dilemma.” – Downtown Business Owner

“As a server it is important that I have the opportunity to park for free as often as possible. Parking passes for private lots are expensive, and so are the current rates at the public lots.” – Downtown Employee

“I lead a faith community that gathers Downtown on Sundays. I cannot fathom having to tell people they will need to pay to park to go to church.” – Downtown Business Owner

“My clients are already paying for my service, asking them to also pay to park every visit is not reasonable. This was a major factor in choosing an office location for my business. I risk losing clients if parking fees increase and/or free parking decreases.” – Downtown Business Owner

“I think free parking is essential, but we should do away with parking minimums in the downtown core to encourage more construction of residences downtown. I'd also be in favor of removing street parking to allow for more on street dining options and wider sidewalks.” – Brad, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“I go to church downtown and this would financially impact my family's ability to attend worship.” – Laurel, Downtown Visitor/Patron

“Paying by the hour for downtown parking would influence my decision to shop locally-owned downtown businesses or eating in downtown establishments. In some cases it might deter my choosing to shop or eat out downtown or possibly reduce my spending on food or purchases while shopping, eating, or attending concerts, shows or movies.” – Kitty, Downtown Visitor/Patron

ABOUT THE SURVEY

This survey was sponsored and developed by the Downtown Merchants Group and not affiliated with the City of Knoxville. The Downtown Merchants Group is supported by several area businesses, including Mast General Store, Downtown Wine & Spirits, Coffee & Chocolates, Cruze Farm Ice Cream, Earth To Old City, Boyd's Jig & Reel, Brother Wolf and Bliss.

The survey was conducted online via Google Forms from February 29 to March 15, 2024, and received a total of 15,344 responses. For quality assurance purposes, each respondent was required to provide an email address. If respondents completed the survey more than once using the same email address, only the first response was retained. As a result, 65 of the 15,344 responses were excluded from the analysis.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

| Category | Percent (%) | Frequency (#) |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Downtown Resident | 3.7% | 563 |
| Downtown Business Owner | 1.4% | 212 |
| Downtown Patron/Visitor | 75.6% | 11,559 |
| Downtown Worker/Employee | 16.7% | 2,552 |
| None of the Above | 2.6% | 396 |

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Downtown Parking Survey – Free Nights & Weekends

The City of Knoxville recently hired a consultant to provide an analysis and recommendations for a strategic downtown parking plan. For many years free parking spaces have been available in city-run lots and garages nightly after 6pm and on weekends. On-street parking is also free on Sundays. Depending on the recommendations from the consultant, the future of free parking in downtown Knoxville is uncertain.

The purpose of this survey is to gauge the benefits of the current Free Nights and Weekends policy.

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Q1: Email

Q2: Please provide your name

Q3: Do you work, operate a business, live or own property Downtown?

Q4: Which option best describes you? (If you fall into more than one category, please choose the one the most directly relates to your parking experiences in downtown).

- I am a downtown resident
- I work downtown
- I visit downtown for services and amenities
- I own a business downtown
- None of the above

Q5: Generally speaking, would you say there is too much, too little, or the right amount of free parking in and around downtown Knoxville?

- Too much
- Too little
- Right amount

Q6: As you may know, the City of Knoxville is considering changes to its current parking policies. The city is considering doing away with free parking on nights and weekends. This could mean residents, employees and visitors would have to pay to park in city-run lots and garages 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Do you favor or oppose ending the city's current policy of free parking on nights and weekends?

- Favor strongly
- Favor somewhat
- Oppose Somewhat
- Oppose Strongly

Q7: Which statement comes closest to your own view?

- The city should expand its current free parking policy (i.e., more days/hours)
- The city should restrict its current free parking policy (i.e., fewer days/hours)
- The city should not allow free parking at any time
- The city shouldn't make any changes to its current parking policy

Q8: If you are a downtown employer or business owner, do you think ending the Free Nights & Weekends policy would have an impact on your ability to retain and/or attract new employees?

- Strongly Positive Impact
- Somewhat Positive Impact
- No Impact
- Somewhat Negative Impact
- Strongly Negative Impact
- I am not an employer/not applicable

Q9: If you are a downtown employer or business owner, do you think ending the Free Nights & Weekends policy would have an impact on the number of people who patronize your business?

- Strongly Positive Impact
- Somewhat Positive Impact
- No Impact
- Somewhat Negative Impact
- Strongly Negative Impact
- I am not an employer/not applicable

Q10: If you would like to provide additional comments please do so below.