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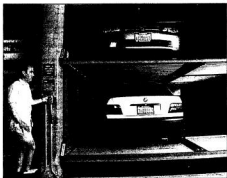


Illustration Courtesy: Planet 3100

The Berkeleyan building on Oxford Street uses a hydraulic mechanized system for parking tenants' cars. The city is considering a variation for its downtown parking garage.

## Technology lets parking garages handle more cars

By MARCUS GARIBOLDI  
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City officials who want to alleviate parking shortages in downtown Berkeley are examining several strategies, including computer-assisted parking.

Robotic Parking Inc. of Lakonia, Ohio, the manufacturer of "Robotic Parking," offers one solution: the company's patented Modular Automated Parking System.

According to the Robotic Parking web site ([www.robotpark.com](http://www.robotpark.com)), the system uses lifts, pallets and carriers to move cars through the garage. No attendants are required.

Cars travel on the pallets through the garage using flexible transfer. Parking customers leave

their cars in a pallet in a secure entrance area and the system moves the car to an open space. Customers would retrieve their cars by inserting a ticket and waiting for their cars to appear in a forward-facing position in the exit bay.

According to Robotic Parking, the technology is the same as what is used to transport cars on assembly lines everywhere.

The beauty of its promise is that Robotic Parking, which has a project under construction in Hoboken, N. J., uses half the space required by a typical parking lot outfitted with ramps, the company says.

For a structure like the city's Center Street Garage that could mean its 420 spaces could be

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# Downtown facing parking crunch, DBA says

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doubled if the building had conventional-staircase parking, or those spaces could be retained in half the space required now.

A similar system already exists in Patrick Kennedy's building on Oakland Street. The Berkeleyan, a mixed-use residential structure. Other buildings owned by his Proconomic Interest company have done, too.

The Berkeleyan uses a hydraulic mechanical system manufactured by Klann Parking, a German company. There are 30 parking lifts in its large first-floor garage where cars are stacked in tiers of three up to the ceiling.

Koskunen uses a key to bring the upper tiers down to street level, and in about 45 seconds, their cars arrive ready to drive out the door or the reverse.

"They are working without inci-

dent and to the universal relief of all," said Kennedy. He said he is unfamiliar with Rubbia's Parking but advocates the concept for his own office in Berkeley.

The Center Street Garage is the far scheme retrofitting of it will be dismantled and replaced. A third possibility is building up to three more floors above the five already existing floors.

George Prokowitz, manager of Off Street Parking, estimates that 80-plus cars are held on each floor of the Center Street Garage, which is the only city-owned garage downtown.

Mayor Shirley Dean has proposed the city investigate the feasibility of robotic parking for the Center Street Garage, but the item was postponed at Tuesday's City Council at the request of Councilmember Kirtis Worthington. It will be discussed at a later meeting.

Dean suggested the parking

alternative would be financed with a self-supporting bond and with funding from people who would benefit from more parking spaces.

Robotic parking could be one part of the solution to the parking crunch downtown, she said. A Transit Plus Think Forum has been formed to develop a proposal for an aerial citywide pass for multimodal transit on AC Transit, more housing downtown, bicycling and walking campaigns are other avenues suggested by the mayor.

Deborah Rubbia, executive director of the Downtown Berkeley Association, would back robotic parking if it were proved to be a feasible option to provide additional parking.

She said due to construction, the downtown already has lost one street parking space.

"The most important thing for our membership," she said, "is a net increase in parking in the

downtown."

Some leases are temporary but others are permanent, she said. "Mixed spaces are the most valued thing downtown to shoppers," Rubbia said. "Motors in front of stores mean cash sales at registers."

Planners are looking down the road to the time when all the new construction is completed and more potential parkers are distributed in the downtown.

But there are mitigating factors. Rubbia, for instance, fears arts districts customers will arrive in the evenings after the daytime population peak hours.

Commissioner Donna Spring whose district includes downtown, said she is open to the possibility of robotic parking if it is feasible.

She said she has seen pictures of Kennedy's hydraulic lifts, but said the use is different because it is for residential buildings.

"It's quite a bit more costly to move around a lot of cars," she said.

"I think increasing the parking at Center Street could be the least defensible alternative, rather than taking space that could be used for housing."

Worthington disagreed with the focus on one particular location. "I think we need to have a balanced approach: addressing neighborhood and business issues throughout all the business districts in the city," he said.

He cited a Transportation Demand Management study that the city already has begun in the Planning Department, in cooperation with the university.

He said he agreed with a letter to councilmembers from the Chamber of Commerce that the proposal for studying robotic parking should be coordinated with the transportation study.