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Worcester's Kelley Square Parking Experiment

BY SAMANTHA P. MCDONALD • JUNE 13, 2018

May 22 drew crowds of government officials, area executives, project professionals, and the press with the groundbreaking for Worcester's new Kelley Square Market. The launch of this project bolsters the excitement of the Canal District – new apartments and a public market, a return to the mixed use development that built thriving cities. The building will be, in some ways, the antithesis of the Galleria/Worcester Common Fashion Outlets, portions of which were recently demolished.

Remember when the Fashion Outlets opened? Enthusiasm over the very chic shopping downtown was overshadowed by the horror of paying to park, despite the low cost. When news first spread about the Kelley Square Market project a year or two ago, most initial reactions to the developer, Allen Fletcher, were "...but what about the parking?" Many worried that taking away the (muddy, rutted or flooded) parking for the Crompton building next door would cause declining business for the tenants there, based solely on the old chestnut that people in Worcester simply will not pay for parking. However, Fletcher pointed out that parking is never free in Boston, yet people still visit every day.

In part, the Market is possible because of the City's Commercial Corridors Overlay District, adopted in 2015. Its intent, under Article IX, Section 1 (A) of the [City Zoning Ordinance](#), is to "encourage compact, pedestrian friendly development...[that] limit[s] parking...and provide[s] incentives for mixed-use development." Mixed use design was the norm before the advent of zoning a little more than 100 years ago, and promotes dense and creative land uses. Strong city areas are built around walkable areas that are not centered around the car.

And the Canal District is a strong city area. The businesses in the Canal District have reached a stage of development where they provide the things we want to see or do. People are willing to wait in line for Birch Tree Bread Company; it stands to reason that they'll be willing to park half a block away too. There really is plenty of nearby parking: There are several public parking lots less than 500 feet away from the Kelley Square Market, and lots more street parking on Green Street and side streets. With 30-40 new food stalls and vendors, the Worcester Public Market is only going to increase the list of reasons to park and walk all around the Canal District, not inhibit visitors to Crompton. (And after a visit to the Public Market, we are really going to need the walk!)