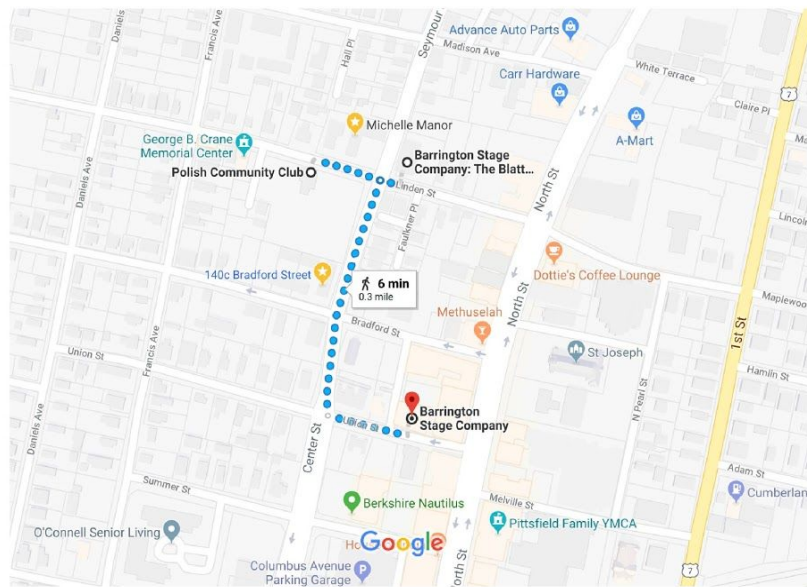


BSC Parking and Pathways Improvement Project

Findings and Recommendations



A report in partnership with Barrington Stage Company

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Abstract

This report shares findings from a research project focused on improving Barrington Stage Company (BSC) patrons' experiences travelling to and from shows at the Main Stage and Blatt Center. The research consisted of multiple site visits to the areas adjacent to the BSC buildings, careful study of Google satellite images of the streets in question, and benchmarking research on wayfinding techniques. I looked for conditions which potentially deter patrons from walking and driving in the area, including but not limited to poor lighting, landscape blight, and inadequate wayfinding.¹ I followed up this research with an exploration of potential low-cost improvements that could be undertaken by BSC in partnership with other community stakeholders.

I recommend targeted landscaping, lighting and access improvements to the Polish Community Club, creative wayfinding techniques, a collaborative neighborhood beautification initiative, and the exploration of a pilot theatre-arts parking pass. Advanced together, these efforts could improve the look and tone of the neighborhood for non-locals as well as bolster the sense of pride among residents.

Introduction

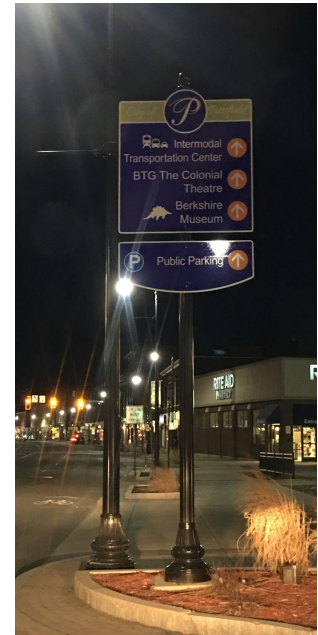
Complaints about parking in downtown Pittsfield reached fever pitch during 2017 and show no signs of abating. Many visitors to Pittsfield, especially older arts patrons, have expressed their frustration and concerns: problems operating the new meters or knowing when the meters are active, being



¹The term "Wayfinding" in architecture and urban planning, refers "to the user experience of orientation and choosing a path within the [built environment](#). [Kevin A. Lynch](#) used the term for his 1960 book *The Image of the City*, where he defined wayfinding as "a consistent use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment." (from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayfinding>). More on wayfinding at: <https://asisignage.com/2012/03/12/converting-the-science-of-wayfinding-into-practical-art/> Images and resources collected in this research can be accessed in the Google File Folder at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1drlDkLi5t9woMxYHNbnfSX-u2LN8MOhMZI_WkC6w3L4/edit?usp=s [haring](#). and are included in the Appendices to this report.

directed to a public lot to see that the spots are for permits only, not feeling safe parking at the Columbus Avenue lot, etc.

The problem of BSC patrons' negative parking and pedestrian experiences risks not just the success of future BSC programming but also the related economic benefits to the City of Pittsfield. Barrington Stage Company is one of the performing arts nonprofits which contributes significantly to the economic vitality of Berkshire County as a whole--but most especially to Pittsfield. According to research commissioned by the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, "every 100,000 nonlocal visitors to Berkshire County cultural organizations increases economic activity by \$8.8 million and supports 115 jobs in the county."² Barrington Stage Company's award-winning productions have drawn more non-local visitors to Pittsfield in recent years. In 2017 alone, BSC brought in 58,500 people to Pittsfield from 47 states and 12 countries. With strong community support, BSC has the potential to bring many more!



The City of Pittsfield has done an admirable job of renovating North Street, which now has very appealing lighting, landscaping, and signage. Unfortunately, adjacent and parallel streets to the west of North Street are in rough shape. Center Street (which turns into the roughly paved Seymour Street at Linden) has no crosswalks. Tiny Northrup Street (between Union and Bradford) is riddled with potholes, and the Columbus Avenue Parking Garage (off of Summer Street) is so dilapidated that spaces in both its lower and upper decks are unuseable.

Since major improvements will not likely be possible in the near term, it is advisable to work quickly to make the many simple, smaller-scale improvements that can



²Sheppard, Stephen, and Oehler, Kay, "The Economic Impact of Non-profit Organizations in Berkshire County: A Report Commissioned by the Berkshire County Chamber of Commerce," December 2010 (revised edition), The Center for Creative Community Development (C3D), North Adams, MA, p.44.

address safety concerns, improve visitors' overall experiences and signal a strong, welcoming community.

The Process

I began with a detailed review of the conditions of the streets and properties adjacent to the BSC theaters. I examined the parking options and the likely walking paths from each to the respective theaters, or in some cases, via restaurants which patrons might frequent on the way to performances (see Appendix A for satellite and street views).

My review corroborates the concerns that many older patrons have shared with BSC management: namely, that for those unfamiliar with the area and unaccustomed to using online information and electronic meters, the process of parking and walking to and from the theatre is confusing and at night, potentially scary. There is no one garage or lot that can serve all patrons, as the closest one, the Columbus Avenue Garage, is partially unuseable and looks risky because of crumbling concrete and peeling paint. Lighting is poor in some walking areas, some of the nearby landscaping is unkempt, and relevant street markings (such as crosswalks) are either very worn or nonexistent. These conditions create an overall negative impression that contributes to anxiety among some patrons.



Closed parking section in the Columbus Avenue Garage (Summer St. side)



Closed upper parking deck



Peeling paint



Above, left: The Polish Community Club at night- it has no significant lighting or crosswalks. On the right: Dim street light to the east of the Blatt Center on Linden Street. BSC could put a floodlight on the corners of the Blatt to help, but an additional street light and bulb replacement for this one would be the appropriate solution. In the short term, decorative lighting could be used (See 1(b), p.8).



The view down Linden Street (from North Street looking west) at dusk.
The tree at right could be lit up to aid in wayfinding



Lack of light in alley leading to Mainstage



Back of nearby building- potential flood light location



Unkempt landscaping- views of street side bushes (before the March 2018 clean-up)

Recommendations for Further Improvement

Luckily, because of work already begun and relationships that can be strengthened, there are many improvements that can be made at relatively low cost if a collaborative approach is taken. Addressing these issues will benefit not only Barrington Stage Company but also downtown merchants and the city as a whole. Inviting, visitor-friendly downtown neighborhoods will improve the experience of all while helping the economic and cultural development of the community.

I recommend three promising sets of improvements, some of which are already underway: 1) property and access improvements to the Polish Community Club lot and

other current or potential parking areas (esp. the Summer Street Parking Garage); 2) the development of a creative wayfinding plan; 3) a neighborhood garden planter initiative; and 4) exploration of a pilot theatre-arts parking pass.

Let us consider each of these in turn.

1. Property Improvements and Additional Parking Options:

- a) The Polish Community Club presents an opportunity to increase the amount of available parking and improve the neighborhood atmosphere. Its large lot with additional lawn available for parking can host as many as 60 cars. The area needs better landscaping, lighting, walkable pathways to the parking lot, and adjacent crosswalks. The organization is currently closed but is a willing partner for neighborhood improvement. Manager Steve Filio recently hosted a corner clean up with help from a small team of Williams College students. The team collected four bags of garbage from the Club's border bushes, spread mulch and helped Mr. Filio prune the overgrown perimeter hedges. Williams students will return for another round of indoor and outdoor clean-up, path-making, and potentially the installation of some flower and herb planters (see #3, below) during the College's annual Spring Great Day of Service on April 21st organized by the Lehman Community Engagement (a college student organization). The group's tools and supplies will be provided by the Center for Learning in Action. Additional guidance and support for this work could be provided by Pittsfield Beautiful organization and the nearby St. George's Greek Orthodox Church.



Pedestrian view of the Polish Community Club (pre-clean-up)



Polish Community Club, after initial clean-up

- b) Linden Street lighting improvements (between North Street and Center Street).
The addition of creative lighting in and on the large tree next to the Blatt Center parking lot could compensate for the weak street light until the public lighting can be improved.



Potential location of tree lights which would brighten the walk to the Blatt Center

- c) Scrape and paint the pillars in the Summer Street Parking Garage. This could be a community service project of a school or community group. If a high priority, it could be added to the work list for a Williams student volunteer team.
- d) Fix lumpy pavement on Northrup Street. This is the access route for patrons walking from the Polish Community Club parking lot (and any parking areas to the North of BSC's Mainstage).



2. Wayfinding plan:

I recommend improving existing signage with the following coordinated wayfinding improvements:

- a) Sidewalk stencils “To BSC MainStage>>” or “BSC Blatt Center>>” with stars stenciled nearby, ideally using temporary glow-in-the-dark pavement paint in a pilot experiment for Summer and Fall 2018. Signs and sidewalk stencils will likely require permission from the City of Pittsfield and possibly the State Department of Transportation, depending on locations.
- b) Temporary banners on fences (near St. Joe’s, medical building parking area, Berkshire Nautilus building parking lot). The photos, below, show some possible locations:



- c) Metal signs indicating “Theatre Parking >” could be attached to poles with other signs on North and nearby streets; these could be attached to current Public Parking signs and other street signs. These would complement the banners, described above. Since larger clarifying signs on existing permit lots would be costly, it would make the most sense to add weather-resistant sticker labels to existing signs noting the permit and free parking hours so that patrons could readily see the availability of parking. Patrons often see the “permit parking” signs and assume that they cannot park there.
- d) Increased lighting is needed, as noted above, for the Polish Community Club Parking lot, as well as Center Street, Northrup Street, and the alley between

Hotel on North and Union Street. Ideally, solar landscape and flood lights would be used in these areas.

- e) New crosswalks across Center Street at both Linden Street and Bradford Street would improve safety and encourage patrons to park in the Polish Community Club parking lot.

3. Neighborhood Planter Initiative

I recommend initiating a small beautification initiative involving setting up flower and herb planters in the neighborhood. The effort can start small, with a few set up in late April.

Williams students working for the Williams Center for Learning in Action could reach out (on behalf of BSC and the Polish Community Club) to Pittsfield Beautiful for guidance and strategic support regarding the placement of planters while contacting other potential “planting” partners in the neighborhood such as

St. George’s Greek Orthodox Church, the New Amsterdam Housing Complex and the Christian Center to see if they would be willing to host planters as well. BSC volunteers can help plant them and insure that they remain attractive throughout the growing season. I recommend beginning by organizing a meeting with neighbors, telling them of ideas, and asking for their input and help, which could involve determining locations and choosing plants.



4. Parking Pass

I propose a trial Theatre Parking Pass, possibly in collaboration with the Colonial Theatre and other cultural centers. The special pass would feature access to permit areas on matinee days (Wednesday, Friday) beginning at noon. Passes would be numbered, sold by theatre organizations, and purchased for a set fee, with all funds raised passed through to the city to compensate for any lost revenue from meter or permit payments. Running a pilot of this kind would confirm whether upfront pass payments would exceed what would otherwise be collected from parking meters. Discounted parking pass systems are being used in more and more cities in the U.S.

and around the world (Philadelphia and Glasgow, Scotland) to make accessing city centers more convenient to visitors.

Conclusion

In spite of the major funding challenges and administrative hurdles, this preliminary research suggests that there are ways in which the Barrington Stage Company and its community and neighborhood allies can improve the parking and walking experiences of theater patrons and other visitors to Pittsfield. I am confident that students and community-oriented offices at Williams will continue to step up as enthusiastic learning partners in your community development initiatives. I look forward to continuing to facilitate this work to the extent I am available during these last weeks of my Senior year at Williams.

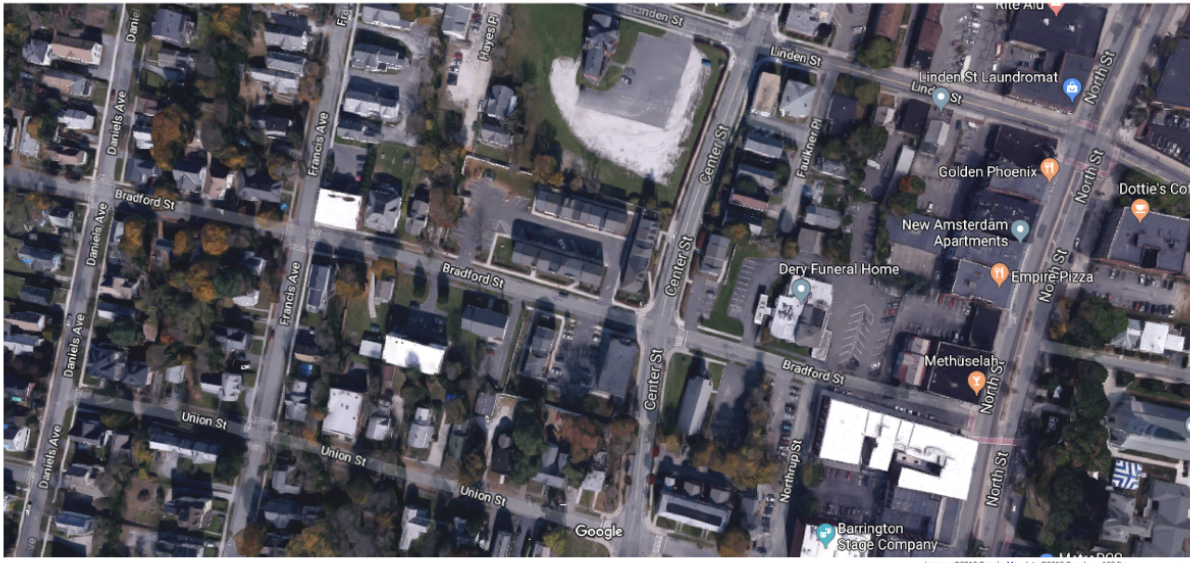
APPENDIX A: RECONNAISSANCE PHOTOS



Potential Linden Street Improvements: 1. location for lights; 2. pole that could hold banner, lights, or display art; 3. horizontal surface for wayfinding marks; 4. potential location of plantings.



Satellite View of BSC Main Stage pathway to Summer Street Garage



Satellite view of Polish Community Club (Crosswalks have faded significantly since this photo was taken. Also, no crosswalk exists across Center Street at Bradford Street.)



Proposed location of new crosswalk: across Center St. at Bradford St.



Potential access walkway location for Polish Community Club parking lot



On April 21st, Williams students (under the guidance of Steve Filio) will gravel this path for easier pedestrian access to the Polish Community Club parking lot



**Entrance to BMC medical complex parking (one block from Blatt),
but only usable during evening and weekend shows**



**Summer Street Parking Garage- 100+ spaces available,
but disrepair leads to safety concerns for patrons**



Underlit Linden Street sidewalks due to dim streetlights



**Tree by Blatt Center- can be lit up with christmas lights or lanterns
to increase visibility and wayfinding**

APPENDIX B: SITE REVIEW DETAIL

1. Location of currently used and potential additional parking spaces (& relevant distances)-

- Current spaces relevant to Main Stage (public parking and private lot partnerships):

Summer St. garage (<.1 mi distance) lower only- 100+ (in great disrepair)

St. Joe's lot (<.2 mi distance) (60-80 spots)

Polish Community Club (.2 mi distance) (30-60+ spots-depending on use of unpaved gravel area) (improvements underway)

North St. (metered) Public Parking- (.1 mi distance) (30-36 spots)

Melville Public Parking (metered) Lot- (.1-.2 mi distance) (up to 100 spots)

-Current spaces relevant to Blatt Center:

Blatt Center & adjacent lot (<.1 mi) (up to 45 spots)

510 North Street lot (after hours?) – (.1 mi) (up to 75 spots)

Polish Community Club (<.1 mi distance) (30-60+ spots-depending on use of unpaved gravel area)

St. Joe's lot (<.2 mi distance) (60-80 spots)

-Potential new spaces & distance to Main Stage-

Shire City Sanctuary lot (next to Boys & Girls Club) (.2 mi distance) (24+ spots)

Corner Summer/Center St. Lot (?) (.1 mi distance) (up to 45 spots)

-Potentially new spaces & distance to Blatt Center-

Carr Hardware Store lot (after hours?) (.12 mi distance) (up to 22 spots)

2. Potential Improvements (shortcuts, wayfinding, and beautification)

Shortcuts:

-Improve viability of Polish Community Club lot use with well lit cut-off paths and crosswalks (see satellite images and photos) to reduce perceived walking distance to stages and improve visibility and safety

-Improve use of the Summer St. Garage with a marked, well-lit short cut through the center of the Summer Street block to the Main Stage - solar lighting, glow in the dark painted stencils, etc.

Wayfinding:

-In general, use glow tape on poles, stars on walks, etc. in concerted way (ie., theme (stars, symbols) and/or slogan "Follow the stars")

-Improve St. Joes lot use with wayfinding (banners on fences, stenciled sidewalk images "This Way to BSC Blatt Center", etc.)

-Improve use of North St. and other meter parking with special windshield passes for patrons

Beautification:

- plantings on blocks along pathways
- paint or clean walls on relevant routes

II. Next Steps:

1. Meet to review accuracy of information and prioritize improvement options, including estimating costs of alternatives and potential sources of funding and in-kind support
2. Meet with key stakeholders to share issues, learn more about their concerns and find potential common ground. Acquire relevant permissions- sidewalk stenciling, planter project, etc.
3. Build support for improvements by offering to collaborate, organize the work (ie., cleaning, painting, planting party in the spring). Community partners such as Pittsfield Beautiful can advise and the Williams College Center for Learning in Action can help pay for plants, paint, stencils and share gloves, paint brushes and other tools for clean up and landscape work and can help draft student volunteers and other community organization partners.

APPENDIX C: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

STRATEGY or TOOL(S)	RESOURCES
<p>Neighborhood Issue Mapping: A day and night review of issues that deter walking and parking in the areas around the BSC main and Blatt Center facilities. Focus on poor lighting, landscape blight, poor wayfinding. Identify highlights to share with neighbors in brainstorming meetings</p>	<p>https://barringtonstageco.org/2015site/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/PATRON-PARKING_MAINSTAGE-NO-ELKS-</p> <p>https://barringtonstageco.org/2015site/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/PATRON-PARKING_BLATT.pdf</p>
<p>Negotiate Parking Spaces with Property Owners: Find out if nearby lot owners will rent their spaces, directly or indirectly</p>	
<p>Neighborhood Brainstorming Meeting(s): Invite neighbors of each of the BSC stages to attend a session (eg., community meals) to learn and share concerns about the area and brainstorm improvements, small and large scale.</p>	<p>https://www.businessballs.com/problem-solving-and-decision-making/brainstorming-for-team-building-and-problem-solving-how-to-109</p> <p>https://www.bcps.org/offices/lis/researchcourse/images/5brainstr.pdf</p>
<p>Focus Group(s): Solicit feedback for pilot ideas from constituency subgroups</p>	<p>Rabbi Josh Breindel offered to host focus groups with his congregants (Temple Anshe Amunim)</p>
<p>Safety Improvements & Wayfinding Techniques: Explore enhanced decorative lighting (such as wrapping lights in trees), improved conventional and unconventional signage (including symbols, sidewalk stencils, vinyl pavement graphics) and small scale public art installations (sculpture, colorful painting of poles, plantings, etc.). Example: The theme “Follow the Stars” could be used to alert people to hanging star lights, glow-in-the-dark stenciled sidewalk stars and stars decals affixed to buildings on the path to the theaters.</p>	<p>https://www.fastsigns.com/products/product-details/pavement-graphics</p> <p>https://www.indyimaging.com/products/psv_decals/sidewalk_pavement_decals/</p> <p>https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0746HG42T/ref=psdc_14107631_t1_B01LVXL9Y5 (LED rope lights)</p> <p>Wayfinding images/approaches at:</p> <p>https://www.google.com/search?q=images+urban+sidewalk+wayfinding&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CSju9ylrqLZaljhNbhvrDpSayuY_1qVhUVWu2jBYrP6uKTYzULT8Mhmi1kpwP21h0hPkdMnWjPHNxohRovZgVhB.JAMSoSCU1uG-sOIJrKEcHEWWFX8LHCKhIJ5j-pWERVa7YRzp9FZiXlqucqEgmMFis_1q4pNjBFMzwUdwmFilyoSCdQtPwyGalWSEYC2M7qxc08xKhJnA_1bWHSE-R0RbBccU5MyvssqEgkydaM8c3GiFBEDZ6jyLkb6qyoSCWi9mBWEEkAxEdUeHoCgrCzt&tbo=u&sa=X&ved=0ahUKFwiGn6Leh-3YAhUEWw0KHZbnAOYQ9C8IHw&biw=1262&bih=629&dpr=1</p> <p>http://www.travelwayfinding.com/cost-effective-urban-wayfinding/</p>

<p>Parking Passes: Negotiate special theater parking passes with the city to ease patron use of parking. Pay the city a set fee for each windshield pass to eliminate need for patrons to use the meters. Distribute summer passes (valid at special times such as weekday matinees) to all subscribers.</p>	<p>https://www.parkingpanda.com/sacramento-community-center-theater-parking</p>
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