

UNCIVILSERVANTS.ORG

“DO YOU PEOPLE HAVE ANYTHING WORTH WHILE IN YOUR PERSONAL LIVES OR YOUR FAMILY LIFE THAT YOU HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHERE POLICE OFFICERS AND OTHER CITY AND STATE EMPLOYEES PARK THEIR CARS???”

-- Anonymous commenter, Uncivilservants.org, March 17th, 2007 2:48 AM

ON MARCH 15TH, TRANSPORTATION Alternatives unveiled an innovative new website, uncivilservants.org. With the site, T.A. announced several new tactics in the ongoing campaign to combat permit parking abuse, and thereby reduce incentives for municipal employees

for grassroots participation in this initiative. The website employs a blend of open source technology and community driven content in an effort to further the goals of the advocacy campaign: to guarantee that all are equal before the law and to quell the epidemic of permit abuse by government workers.

The site has created buzz from the very start, garnering mentions in the AP and local print, television and radio before it even went live, and sparking a lengthy article in the New York Times just a week after its launch. As the site grows it will continue to draw attention to a problem that clogs our streets and poses safety hazards to us all. The parking placard issue is closely tied to authority, privilege and entitlement. Regular citizens rarely have a chance or a safe space to voice their concerns about it in a productive manner; the website helps level the playing field for discussions about permit abuse.

In its first month, the website has created a

T.A. has developed important relationships with the entities within each agency to follow up with formal complaints and disciplinary action for misconduct. Already, numerous agencies have armed us with excellent data to counter arguments made in favor of allowing non-enforcement to continue.

Legislation and Initial Successes

The various studies and initiatives by T.A. and our community partners have sparked the interest of City Councilmembers including Garodnick, Brewer, Yassky, Gennaro, Gentile, James, Liu, Mendez, Gerson and Martinez, who recently introduced Intro 504, a vital piece of good governance legislation that would require the Mayor's Management Report to detail the number of

TakeAction!
Log on to uncivilservants.org, post photos, and help us free our city streets and sidewalks.

Nearly 400 members have joined this effort to date

T.A.'s new website uncivilservants.org has created a legion of online activists fighting parking permit abuse.

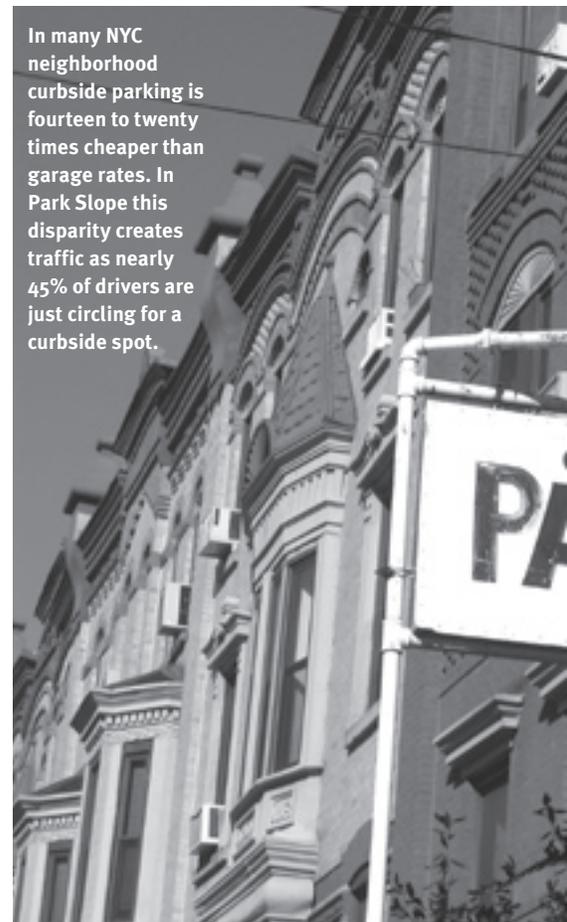
Users post photos of cars illegally using their permits or using false permits

Users post the address of the violation and post comments



unique on-line community, with several hundred registered users debating the issue, hundreds of photos posted to the site, and over 3,000 comments about those photos. What is more, T.A. has heard from numerous agencies that the website dominates conversation around the water cooler at their office, and many are now more conscious about how they use their permits. Parking abuse by government work-

In many NYC neighborhood curbside parking is fourteen to twenty times cheaper than garage rates. In Park Slope this disparity creates traffic as nearly 45% of drivers are just circling for a curbside spot.



to drive to work. Each new component of the campaign shines light on a long-standing problem and strives to find a meaningful resolution to satisfy community residents and government workers alike. Given that government workers drive to work at two to three times the rate as employees in the private sector (due in large part because of their access to parking placards), this campaign is vital to reducing traffic congestion and helping New York City meet its sustainability goals.

Uncivilservants.org provides a platform

ers is clearly a very significant concern for New Yorkers.

Less visible, but integral to the campaign, is the legal work being donated by a local law firm utilizing the logged photos from the site to start New York Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) queries. These FOILs are batched by agency and will help T.A. clarify how permits are issued, which permits are valid, when permits may be properly used, who supervises the permit abusers and the details of formal complaint procedures. In addition to the information received from FOIL queries,

parking placards issued annually by the City. T.A. and our community partners will not rest until the City Council passes this bill or the Mayor voluntarily discloses these numbers.

Responding to community concerns, the website and the extensive press around the issue over the past few months, several NYPD precinct commanders have started to act. In downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan, commanding officers in the 84th and 5th precincts, respectively, have begun to clean up permit abuse by all agencies. In Downtown Brooklyn, Commanding Officer Abel enforced the law on permit holders parking illegally in the Adams Street bike lane, which has been relatively clear for over a month. In Chinatown, Commanding Officer Yee of the 5th Precinct has not only begun strictly enforcing parking in its “Self-Enforcement Zone,” preventing placard holders from parking in front of hydrants, in bus stops and crosswalks, but he has gone up and down some of the worst streets in Chinatown for permit abuse, towing vehicles that do not heed the warnings to park legally.

In the months ahead, we will continue to highlight the most egregious abuses of park-

ing permits, particularly those that cause safety hazards. We have already uncovered several people impersonating government workers, in some instances going to great lengths to personalize license plates from the DMV and fabricate matching placards.

This campaign will help eliminate a source of ongoing tension between community

members and government workers around parking, and ultimately lead to dramatically clearer streets in and around the municipal centers. And by eliminating one of the biggest incentives for government workers to drive (unlimited free parking) it will also help alleviate traffic congestion citywide. □

Parking Improvement Districts Curb Excess Driving

AS VARIOUS CITIES AROUND THE country are demonstrating—San Francisco most recently—it is eminently possible to eliminate unnecessary “cruising” for parking. Cities are doing this in commercial districts where curbside parking is scarce by calibrating curbside parking pricing to achieve an equilibrium where there are always a few empty spots. This ensures that parkers, if willing to pay the fair market value, will always have a fair shot at getting a parking space quickly. The revenue from these “Parking Improvement Districts,” as they are called, can fund improvements to the streetscapes or transit in these neighborhoods.

At T.A.’s invitation, the world’s foremost parking expert, Dr. Donald Shoup, came to New York City with a mission to convince civic, business and city officials that we can have our cake (parking spaces) and eat it too (by creating rational pricing for it) if we pilot these parking improvement districts in commercial areas. After numerous meetings with directors of Business Improvement Districts, the Partnership for NYC, the Mayor’s Long-term Sustainability Team, NYPD, NYC DOT, City Councilmembers and many more policy makers, it is safe to say, “mission accomplished.”

The vacancy target approach, explained by Dr.

Donald Shoup in a *New York Times* op-ed on Thursday, March 29th, applies supply and demand forces and sets curbside parking prices at the lowest rate that yields one or two free spaces per block at any given time. Vacancy optimization reduces both double parking and the amount of traffic that is searching for parking, which has been found to comprise 15 - 45% of all traffic in New York City.

In addition to eliminating drastically underpriced curbside parking, the skewed economic incentive that encourages needless traffic and double parking (i.e., drivers circling the block, looking for cheap parking and, as a result, causing traffic), vacancy optimized curbside parking pricing has the potential to raise millions of dollars to fund necessary street upgrades in Parking Improvement Districts. These initiatives can be used to improve street furniture, pedestrian safety, traffic calming, bus priority measures and more frequent sidewalk cleaning, without reducing income currently received by the City for the general revenue fund.

Finally, municipal governments around the country and the world that have adopted curbside vacancy targets are combining sophisticated muni-meter technologies with curbside occupancy sensors to maintain real-time data on how many vehicles are paying to park at the curb. This has greatly enhanced their abilities to collect revenue and streamline enforcement.

T.A. is currently working with our growing cadre of partners in the business world, with Business Improvement District directors and with city agencies to promote a pilot Parking Improvement District by 2008. Given the strong show of support among many of the potential stakeholders, our hopes are high that New York City will lead the way on market-based parking reform, while making a buck or two in the process for improvements to mass transit, pedestrian safety, and cycling infrastructure. □



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