

A Study Of

**DOWNTOWN PARKING**

In The City Of

**PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA**

**ROBERT E. CROSLAND & ASSOCIATES**

**ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS**

**207 E. MARION AVE. PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA 33950**

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In the City of  
PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA  
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Prepared for the  
City Planning Commission

W. W. Moore, Chairman  
W. H. Cole, Vice Chairman  
L. V. Desguin  
E. E. Hadley  
E. R. Ponger

City Council

P. L. Laishley, Mayor  
C. T. Daniels  
Omar Duff  
R. B. Helphenstine  
N. H. McQueen

G. Wayne Allgire, City Manager

Prepared By  
Robert E. Crosland, Planning Consultant  
207 E. Marion Ave. Punta Gorda, Florida

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## BACKGROUND

Ever since Henry Ford began mass producing automobiles the American public has enjoyed more freedom through greater mobility --- and cities have been pondering, with increasing concern, the problems created by a mobile population. At first the problem was how to control horses startled when one of those "infernal machines" backfired. As the horseless carriage replaced the horse-and-buggy, the problems increased in number and intensity.

With industrialization came more leisure time, and people began moving to the suburban areas to escape. More and more people found the excitement of auto travel. When the public became more mobile, businesses began catering to the traveler. Oil companies began competing for locations for service stations. Hotels became motels. Restaurants began offering curb service. Theaters and even churches became "drive-ins!" Chain stores and neighborhood services began clustering in "shopping centers" located more convenient to the traffic lanes.

The population explosion following World War II continued to soar upward. Per capita income steadily rose. The only available land for housing was the outskirts of the city. And so the mass exodus from the downtown areas to the suburbs continued.

This vast volume of automobiles placed such heavy burdens on traffic arteries that most cities spent most of their efforts (and budget) on bigger and better freeways, throughways, expressways, and downtown distributors. Traffic engineers perfected cloverleaf overpasses to "keep 'em moving." Peripheral drives were developed to keep cross-town traffic from passing through the downtown area.

Sequential traffic lights were synchronized to permit a steady flow of cars into the city in the morning, and reversed for the evening exodus. One-way streets became vogue --- sometimes they actually helped. At least everything was done to keep traffic moving.

But what about PARKING? This became a municipal step-child. Cities said "this is not our problem! We need our streets to move traffic." Of course, they are partly right. We do need our streets primarily for the movement of traffic. But the parking problem has made so many downtown areas obsolete that most cities today are recognizing the fact that parking is their problem. This does not necessarily mean their responsibility.

## THE PARKING PROBLEM

Most cities were surveyed and platted long before the mobilization of the population. Streets and alleys were laid out for a different way of life. The early automobiles were so few in number that parking on the sides of the streets was an accepted solution. Some cities were so modern that they even made special provisions for angular parking to increase the number of cars on each side.

As the mobilization process continued, the narrower streets became inadequate for the imposed traffic. Thus "on-street" parking was no longer an effective solution. Merchants began to see the need to provide parking for their patrons -- after all, no patrons, no profit. But there was no vacant land left in the downtown area. The larger stores began to move out of the downtown area. Land farther out was less expensive, so parking lots could be provided. These larger stores were able to make the move and draw their patrons with them. The smaller merchants were stuck! Land was either not available, or too expensive to devote to parking. With the larger stores gone, there was less walking traffic for the smaller merchant. So they began clustering around the larger stores in shopping centers. Thus, the once busy downtown business districts almost became "ghost towns." Rent became lower -- and lower -- and lower. Soon only third - or fourth-rate businesses remained. Property values depreciated, and so did the tax rolls. Many obsolete buildings stood empty, as silent testimony to the changing times.

This is not a case history of some isolated example -- rather, it is the story of the downtown core of most American cities and towns. The problem of re-vitalizing the downtown business district is high on the priority of most active planning programs. The analysis of urban land economics is complex, and no single solution is applicable.

The heart of the problem is usually obsolescence due to lack of PARKING. Every growing city will have a parking problem somewhere, sooner or later.

A STUDY OF DOWNTOWN PARKING  
in the City of Punta Gorda, Florida

Years ago our streets were built to handle the moderate city traffic and allow parking on either or both sides. This provided adequate parking for our needs, since we had few people and even fewer cars. Today Punta Gorda, like other cities large and small, feels the effect of a population that is growing in both size and mobility. We have more people driving to more places.

Table I shows two graphs of population growth: one for the City of Punta Gorda, and one for Charlotte County. The figures from 1930 through 1960 are based on the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The figures for 1970-1990 are projected. These projections are rather conservative when compared with the population studies of other planning consultants.

Table II gives the motor vehicle registrations for Charlotte County from 1940 to date. Data for this table furnished by personnel in the Tax Collectors office, and include licenses for all types of motor vehicles. No separate record is available for City registrations.

In addition to the increase in population shown in table I, and the increase in local motor vehicle registrations shown in table II, the tremendous increase in automobile tourist traffic is reflected in the following statistics for Charlotte County.\*

<u>Number of Automobile Tourists</u>			<u>Estimated Expenditures (in \$1,000)</u>		
1966	1970	1975	1966	1970	1975
47,107	65,000	92,700	11,315	15,600	22,619

\* Source: Florida Development Commission  
First Research Corporation, of Miami.

With this increased traffic, our streets are fast becoming overcrowded just to handle the moving traffic. Few streets are wide enough to allow for two-way traffic and still have a lane for parking on each side. Most streets are only wide enough to allow parking lane on one side. The traffic on several streets already precludes any parking lanes at all. Thus, with more cars to park, we lose much of the on-street parking. As traffic volume increases it will eventually eliminate almost all on-street parking in the business district.

Table III shows the on-street parking spaces currently available, listed by streets.

Map I shows the distribution of on-street parking spaces within the business district. All on-street parking spaces are parallel to curb except angular parking provided at courthouse, and perpendicular parking along south side of Herald Court at east end. Streets with no parking indicated are either unsuitable paving widths, hazardous traffic, or too far removed from the central business district to afford convenient access. The solid lines indicate existing "no-parking" zones. As traffic volume increases, more streets will have to be so designated.

Table IV indicates the number of available off-street parking spaces, listed by location or business providing same.

Map II shows the location of off-street parking within the business district. It should be noted that only paved parking spaces are included, and locations containing five spaces or less are not indicated (but their total numbers are included in tabulation).

Map III depicts the locations of parking demand that do not offer adequate off-street parking facilities for patrons and/or staff needs. These areas depend upon on-street parking for their patrons' or persons' convenience, or place the parking burden on the off-street parking facilities provided by others. Most of these are "grandfather" businesses--they existed prior to adoption of zoning regulations requiring off-street parking. However, some new or remodeled structures have been oversights as far as enforcement of the code. Some business expansions have actually decreased off-street parking that existed.

The most critical need for additional parking is around the Charlotte County Courthouse, located on the NE corner of W. Olympia Avenue and Taylor Street intersection. Although an unpaved parking area is provided on the south side of Olympia Avenue, it is reserved for courthouse employees. Only 22 parking spaces are available for the public: 9 angular spaces along the east side of Taylor Street, and 13 angular spaces along the south side of Herald Court. There are 15 parallel parking spaces along W. Olympia Avenue south of the courthouse, but these are woefully inadequate to serve the needs of other buildings fronting on this street. At best, these are all on-street parking spaces provided by the City. It would seem incumbent upon the Charlotte County Commissioners to acquire sufficient land, and to provide paved off-street parking for their public and their county personnel.

While the primary responsibility for additional parking around the courthouse clearly rests with the County, other business and professional offices clustered around this location should attempt to meet their parking demands also. Most of these properties are under the "grandfather" clause, but adequate patron parking is just good business. Furthermore, Olympia Avenue is a major east-west traffic artery, and will become even more so because of its width. Already this street is four-lane traffic at its intersection with U.S.41. These no-parking zones will have to be extended west in the not-too-distant future. Thus, on-street parking will be lost, and these properties will be in dire need for off-street parking.

Another critical parking demand is along West Marlon Avenue, between Cross Street and King Street (U.S.41). Much of this area has been developed solid for many years, and many of the structures are obsolete and sub-standard construction. Some remodeling has taken place since the Punta Gorda Mall Shopping Center was developed, and one structure was demolished and replaced with an attractive new one. These improvements have helped the aesthetics, but little has been done to alleviate the parking (except for the Mall parking facilities).

Two factors make this area an extremely difficult problem: One, there is very little available open area left to be acquired for parking in the nearby vicinity; Two, there are a number of different land-owners involved. While W. Marion Avenue is wide enough for on-street parking on both sides throughout this area, it is the major east-west traffic artery in the downtown area. As traffic increases this thoroughfare will need to be four-lane traffic. Adjacent side streets cannot provide the needed parking.

East Marion Avenue between King Street and Nesbit Street could well become the next critical parking demand. This is U.S.17 as it intersects U.S.41. The south side of this street contains 14 parallel on-street parking spaces. The north side is no-parking already. East of Nesbit Street this artery is no-parking throughout its length. The City provides 112 spaces in two parking lots within this one-block area, and two private off-street parking facilities provide 25 additional spaces. If the City should develop its property, and traffic lanes delete the on-street parking in this block, this area would be as critical as the block to its west. Much of this block is in single ownership, however, and could be re-developed. Foresight here would be prudent.

Other areas of the downtown business district do not appear to be in critical parking demand. While many individual business properties depend upon on-street parking, there is generally open land available within a convenient distance. Most of the north-south streets will be available for on-street parking (at least one side) for several years. However, property owners should take notice of their own parking demands, and make plans for any expansion well in advance. A word to the wise, etc.

Perhaps a word of commendation is in order for First Federal Savings and Loan Association and the First National Bank. These institutions expanded (or are expanding) their existing off-street parking facilities. While it is good business practice, it is hopeful that other property owners may take notice and follow this leadership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Area 1 - W. Olympia Ave. between Taylor St. and U.S.41

1. The City of Punta Gorda should request cooperation from the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners in acquiring and paving adequate off-street parking facilities for the public and employees using the County Courthouse.
2. Other property owners in this vicinity should be advised that traffic may soon preclude on-street parking here, and that future expansion or extensive remodeling would require compliance with off-street parking regulations. Encourage joint participation, with several owners purchasing and providing off-street parking for their mutual use.
3. See other general recommendations.

### Area 2 - W. Marion Ave. between Taylor St. and U.S.41

1. It is recommended that the City sponsor an informal meeting of all property owners in the area bounded by Taylor Street on the west, U.S.41 on the east, Marion Ave. on the north, and Herald Court on the south. Present the seriousness of the problem to these owners, and ask for suggestions. If no better solution is offered, ask them to consider forming a holding corporation to develop and own the entire block. Adequate parking for all could be provided on the ground floor, with a shopping mall covering the entire block at the second floor. Ramps could be used for easy access. More stories could be considered if elevators are used. Perhaps additional investors may be interested in participating. If one or two owners did not want to participate, the group may wish to purchase that property and proceed.

There will be numerous questions, doubts, and even scoffs about dreaming. But this type of joint effort by private enterprise CAN work; it HAS worked in similar problems. Construction can even be phased to minimize the time present businesses are "displaced." United effort in this problem can provide much better solutions than individual owners could possibly accomplish separately, and the overall project would be much more economical.

2. If the owners can not get together to redevelop the entire block, perhaps a few could develop the enthusiasm to undertake a half block or quarter block area. Every little bit helps the area, and may encourage other joint-effort development. This same approach would be applicable to any smaller group of older buildings.
3. See other general recommendations.

## General Recommendations

1. Strict enforcement of off-street parking requirements will become increasingly important. Present problems in the downtown area will become worse as traffic increases, and this increase is inevitable (and becoming more obvious). Careful examination should be given to ALL new and/or remodeling permits.
2. A fire district should be established for the downtown area, and annual inspections made of all buildings with regard to structural, electrical, plumbing, gas, fire protection, and other public safety factors. This could be accomplished through annual "Certificate of Occupancy" issued by the Building Department.
3. Any buildings or structures not conforming to code standards should be required to promptly meet these standards, or condemned for demolition within a reasonable time. Minimum standards for safety apply to existing buildings, as well as new structures, under the Building Code.
4. It is recommended that the city purchase at least FOUR (4) traffic counting devices (Impulse counters preferably) for use by various departments. These could be programmed to obtain much needed data on traffic conditions, and this data distributed to all departments having use for the information.
5. Origin - destination traffic studies should be made at several key locations around the city. This procedure involves stopping traffic and asking drivers questions as to their origin and their destination. This gives essential data as to where the traffic is coming from, and where it is going. This information cannot be determined by mechanical counters, but is quite useful in planning new traffic arterials to get people where they want to go more directly. Perhaps more traffic can be routed around the business district and thereby lessen the congestion.
6. On-street parking close to intersections should be eliminated due to blocking vision. One example is E. Olympia Ave. at Nesbit Street. It is recommended that the end space on the north side (in front of First National Bank), and opposite on the south side, be designated no-parking. This would not create hardship because off-street parking lots are available on both sides.
7. Angular or perpendicular parking IS NOT RECOMMENDED for any on-street parking due to the wider paving required, and the hazard of backing into traffic. This does not imply elimination of existing angle parking at the courthouse, nor the perpendicular parking along south side of Herald Court.
8. A cost analysis should be made of the off-street metered parking lots owned by the city to determine the economic feasibility of maintaining said parking. It might be advantageous for the city to sell one or more of these lots to private property owners to enable them to meet

their off-street parking requirements. This would put the property back on the tax roll, and the City might use the sale price to obtain other more needed parking areas.

9. In areas of high parking demand, the City might consider installing meters, or shortening the time limit for on-street parking spaces. If this is strictly enforced it would minimize excessive overtime parking where the need is greatest. It would also eliminate store employees from monopolizing the much needed parking.
10. A general statement from the City, in the form of a newspaper announcement concerning the parking problem, would remind many store owners of individual responsibility in regard to patron parking, and they could instruct their employees not to abuse the off-street parking provided by others. This has been a common complaint among those who do provide the required parking facilities.

#### CONCLUSION

Adequate off-street parking is the prime responsibility of property owners whose function generates the parking demand. In the case of governmental agencies creating parking demand, the parking should be provided by that governmental agency. The principal function of city streets is to promote safe and efficient movement of traffic -- not storage for cars.

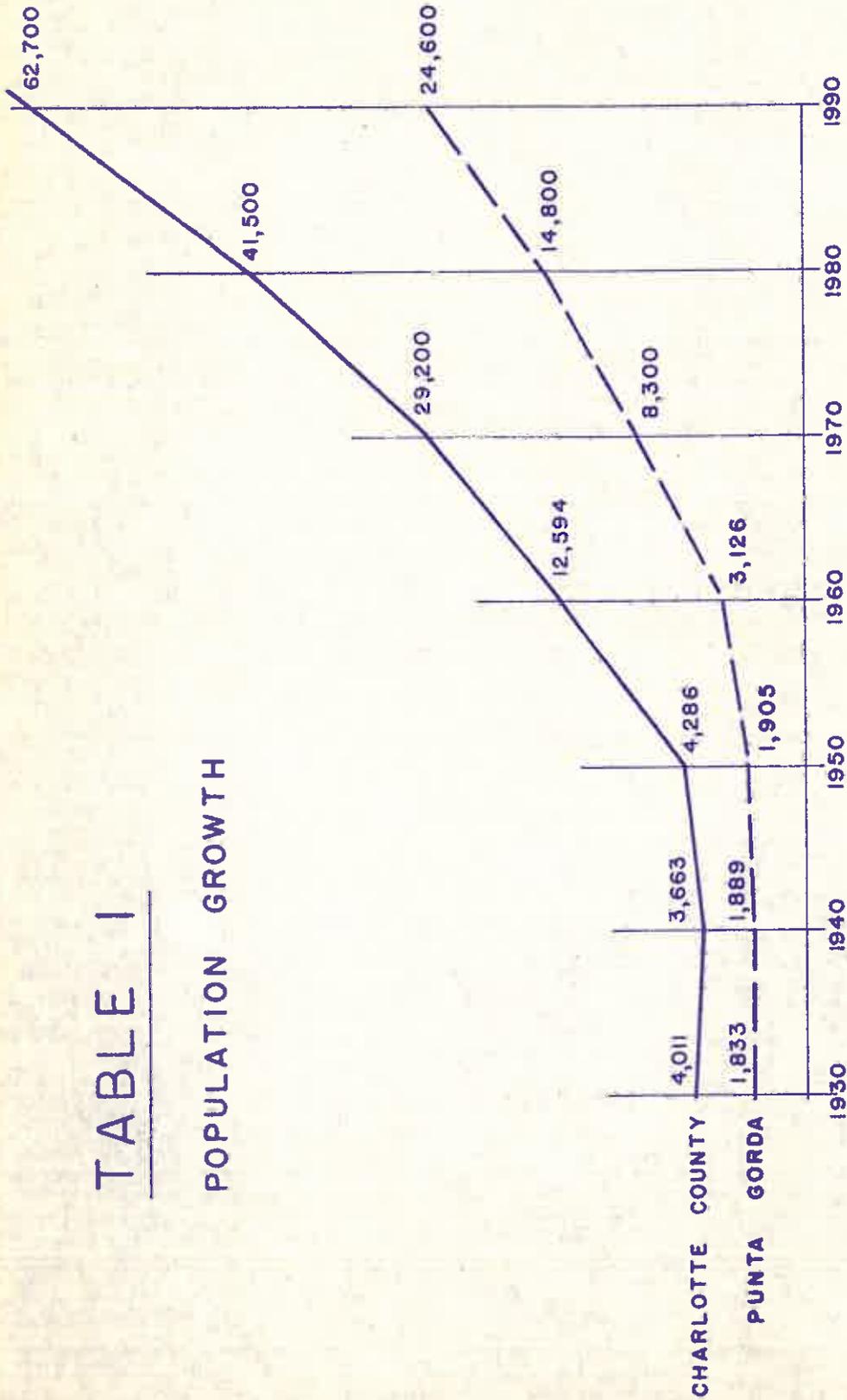
This does not excuse the City from any responsibility in the parking problem however. Where areas were allowed to overbuild without off-street parking requirements, the individual property owners may be quite helpless in solving the problem. It then becomes a city function to assist in the solution. With condemnation power, cities often secure and maintain parking lots to alleviate congested traffic and stabilize land value in the business district. Quite often cities will take the lead in stimulating and encouraging private enterprise to join forces in solving their own parking problem.

Churches, too, should realize their responsibility in providing off-street parking. While not many churches occupy downtown locations, the weekly overcrowding of adjacent streets does create traffic hazards in narrow residential streets.

It is the responsibility of the City to properly regulate and fairly enforce traffic and parking for the general welfare. In overcrowded and congested areas it becomes the City's responsibility to recognize the problems and take remedial action. If this can be accomplished by leading private owners to solve the problem by joint action, this is the most desirable and least expensive for the municipality. If this cannot be accomplished through voluntary joint effort, then the City should apply whatever legal force is reasonably required -- including condemnation of property for public use.

# TABLE I

## POPULATION GROWTH



SOURCE: 1930 - 1960 U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS  
1970 - 1990 PROJECTED

TABLE 11  
MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS  
for Charlotte County

1940 -----	1,148	1955 -----	3,862
1941 -----	1,157	1956 -----	4,613
1942 -----	997	1957 -----	5,392
1943 -----	900	1958 -----	6,781
1944 -----	1,034	1959 -----	8,443
1945 -----	1,141	1960 -----	9,542
1946 -----	1,272	1961 -----	11,197
1947 -----	1,521	1962 -----	12,597
1948 -----	1,802	1963 -----	13,203
1949 -----	1,995	1964 -----	13,989
1950 -----	2,150	* 1965 -----	12,982
1951 -----	2,276	1966 -----	14,084
1952 -----	2,598	1967 -----	14,952
1953 -----	3,068	1968 -----	16,085
1954 -----	3,503	1969 -----	16,504

sold through March  
(Expire June 1)

\* Decrease due to the fact mobile homes were placed on Personal Property tax roll for 1965, rather than motor vehicle license.

Source: Data furnished by courtesy of Tax Collectors office personnel.

TABLE 111  
ON-STREET PARKING  
Spaces Available By Street

Marion Avenue -----	87
Herald Court -----	25
Olympia Avenue -----	180
Cross Street -----	38
Sullivan Street -----	29
Taylor Street -----	26
Nesbit Street -----	78 *
Dupont Street -----	48
Wood Street -----	40
Cochran Street -----	72
	-----
Total	623

Includes 16 spaces limited to 15 minute parking at Post Office.

TABLE IV  
OFF-STREET PARKING\*  
Spaces Provided By Location

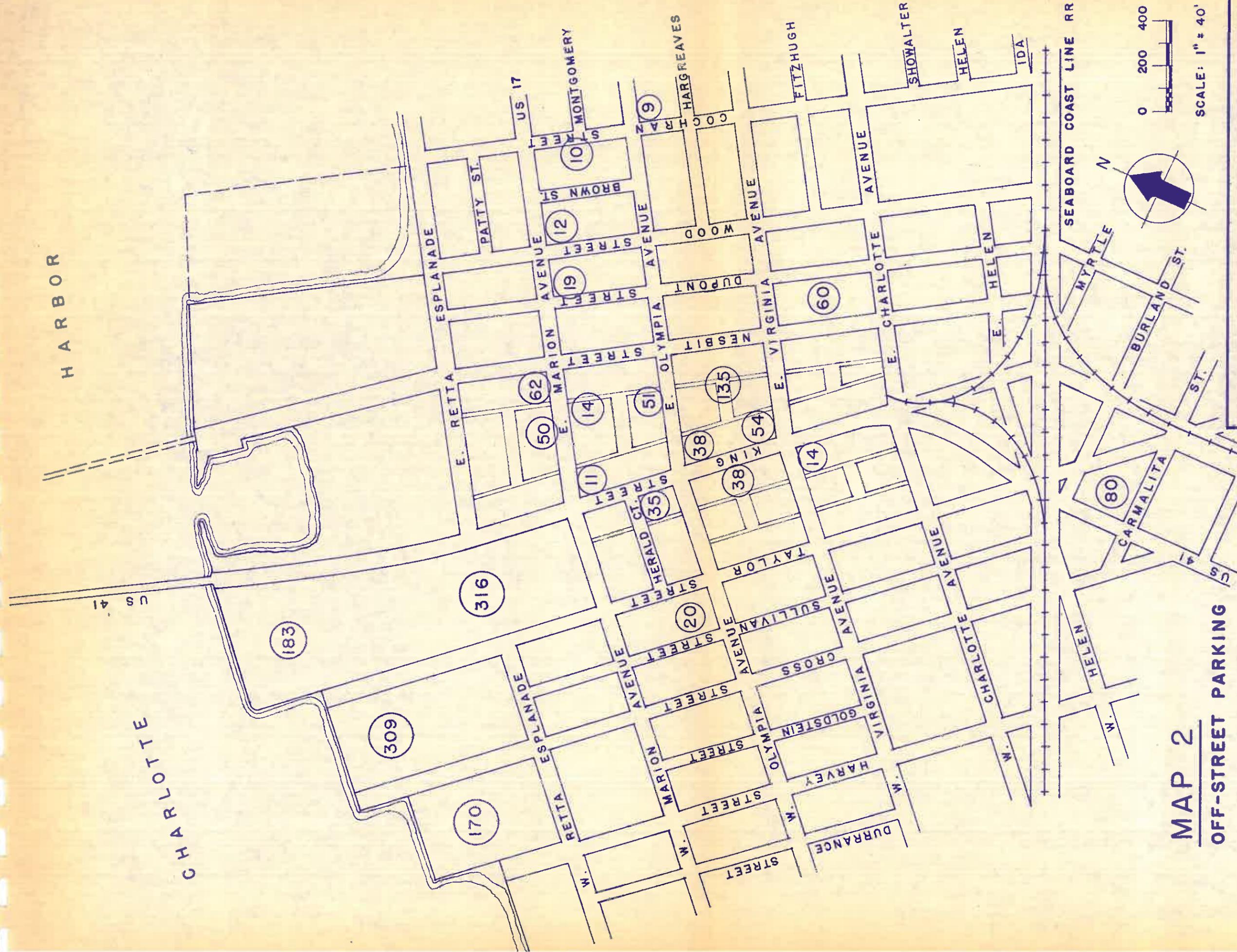
City Parking Lots	
E. Marion Avenue at Nesbit Street -----	62
E. Marion Avenue, West of Public Safety Bldg. ----	50
U.S. 41 at Herald Court -----	35
Howard Johnson Restaurant & Motel -----	183
Punta Gorda Mall Shopping Center -----	316
County Auditorium (proposed parking) -----	309
Holiday Inn Motel & Restaurant -----	170
Charlotte Shopping Center -----	135
Charlotte Shopping Center Auxiliary -----	60
A & P Shopping Center -----	80
First National Bank -----	51
First Federal Savings & Loan -----	38
Shrimp House Motel & Restaurant -----	54
Harry's Restaurant -----	38
Wotitsky, Wotitsky & Schoonover -----	20
Florida Power & Light Company Office -----	19
Seven - Eleven Market -----	14
Graff Building -----	14
Trailways Bus Station -----	12
Lynn Optician -----	11
Jackson's Minit Market -----	10
Olympia Grocery -----	9
Miscellaneous Businesses having 5 spaces or less (total)	76
	-----
	1,766

\* Only paved spaces available to patrons are included.  
Unpaved areas or spaces provided for staff only are not considered.



HARBOR

CHARLOTTE



# MAP 2

OFF-STREET PARKING

(14) — 14 SPACES



SCALE: 1" = 40'

**ROBERT E. CROSLAND & ASSOCIATES**  
 ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS  
 207 E. MARION AVE.  
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**MAP 3**

**PARKING DEMAND**

**ROBERT E. CROSLAND & ASSOCIATES**  
 ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS  
 207 E. MARION AVE.  
 PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA 33950