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**THE *REAL* HISTORY OF CAMPUS PARKING AT OHIO STATE**

The Business Office of The Ohio State University is proposing to sell off campus parking. This is presented as a business matter, a way to make money as the state legislature furnishes less and less support for the University.

Parking on campus is not a business matter. It is, and always has been, until recently, a faculty matter. It is hard to imagine someone undertaking to be an officer of an American college or university who does not know that “faculty parking” is an extremely sensitive issue—to the point that it is commonly known to be a matter for joking and humor.

Only someone who was an extremist on “businessizing” a university would be so out of touch as to make parking a priority item. And it is particularly inappropriate at The Ohio State University because the administrative unit in charge of administering parking has probably in recent times been the best run nonacademic unit in the University.

At Ohio State, in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was parking near all of the campus buildings and on the street. The campus was alive and vibrant until late in the evening, and one could hold faculty meetings and lectures at night because faculty could park near their workplaces. And that was the key: parking was for faculty. There were about the same number of students as later—45,000. But the system worked well. Now, with no parking in central campus, it is scary at night, and evening functions are rare so that use of the plant is severely restricted, which is economically less than intelligent.

The only people who were discontented with the original system were some of the middle-to- higher echelon administrators. They were suddenly dealing with a campus that had turned from a sleepy teaching institution into a real, world-class university with world-class faculty. Of course there had always been outstanding faculty, such as a modest teacher in the then College of Agriculture who was one of the pioneers in genetics, but no administrators understood that. Now, however, by the 1960s, there were lots of such people.

Within the administration, there were wonderful support staff. But somehow a culture had developed at one level: these administrators were handling huge sums of money, but they did not have the parking privileges of the faculty. The administrators saw faculty who made low salaries and were often clumsy and unworldly and yet had parking and, for example, bookstore privileges. Being human, and not understanding what a world-class university was, these administrators resented every sign of deference to faculty members. Why should a new assistant professor have a parking privilege that was denied a middle-level administrator? And the question became redefined as “privilege,” instead of having parking accessible to the workplace where teaching and research, the real work of the University, were going on.

This culture of envy was of course hidden. But sometimes, at their poker parties when they had had a little too much beer, the truth came tumbling out—their envy and contempt for professors who did not have to keep 8 to 5 hours and acted self-important. And had “privileges.” So to these administrator, parking was a matter of status, not of making the work of the University efficient.

What I am describing was a real, simmering subculture on the campus, not something someone imagined. And over the years, it worked itself out, particularly under weaker presidents and vice presidents.

One step was to give high administrators “A” (faculty) parking “privileges.” But what about the next level down? There just was not enough room. And so another approached evolved. It was called campus planning.

The administrators by chance found ideological planners who opposed all parking on campus and wanted to make the University into a public monument and park, totally ignoring the fact that teaching and research were going on in the buildings.

Meanwhile another contingent event came along, the so-called campus riots of the 1970-1971 period, and the culture of envy struck. The administrators closed the campus, and only administrators were allowed on campus, not faculty. And, lo, when things slowly opened up, parking areas were closed off or restricted, all in the name of “emergency.” And of course, the faculty never got those parking places back.

There followed a long war of attrition. The goal: to eliminate all remaining faculty parking from the central campus. The campus planners, foot by foot, set about over the years destroying one on-campus parking place after another. It was very childish, and one could see the “game” playing out, even though each step was obvious. If a parking area was re-surfaced, or a new curb put in, some area would clumsily (and unesthetically) protrude into former parking places on the pretense that a bush had to be planted there. Or, as next to the new University Hall so that there would be a concrete plaza serving no function whatsoever except to extend into the street where there had formerly been parking. It was amazing over time how much effort and money went into destroying even just one or two parking places on campus.

The alleged rationale was to turn the central campus into a pedestrian walkway. The planners claimed to be trying to reduce auto-pedestrian interaction. This is a spooky hazard. But what was the record? In the 1960s, before faculty parking started disappearing, there were no problems of pedestrian accidents. There were accidents, but they were on the peripheral streets, not where there was faculty parking. (One can verify this by accident reports in *The Lantern* and the few remaining records.)

The model for having a pedestrian campus came from a model of the small college—say of 1800 students out in the country. This was the constant ideal held up, with idyllic pictures. This was of course totally inappropriate for a major urban university, much less one with really driven, important faculty members, many of whom were bringing in huge grants and attracting graduate students and postdocs from all over the world.

The planners, acting for the administrators, found an ally in a planning firm in Boston. This firm specialized in part in small college campuses, and over the years, they were repeatedly asked to draw up plans for the University. At one public meeting, the principal in that part of the firm, thinking he had a totally sympathetic audience, revealed his extreme, really unbalanced, hostility to the automobile. Such rhetoric was music to the ears of the local planners. At a later time, when South Oval Drive was being closed down (allegedly for traffic, but actually to remove parking spaces), I had the chance to talk in a private and friendly way with one of the junior members of the firm. I mentioned that the “mall” model from the 1950s of closing downtown streets in towns was by that time totally out of date, but it was being used to argue for restricting faculty vehicles from the OSU central campus. He readily agreed with me. He said, yes, at some future time, of course South Oval Drive would again be paved and opened to traffic. He added that he and others in the consulting outfit were competent and well aware that the model was obsolete, but he said his firm now was in the position that to get the planning consultation fees from Ohio State, they had to tailor their advice to what the University planners wanted, and so they would continue to recommend inappropriate plans.

In fact, when that same firm about 1989 (I have not bothered to look up the exact date) made traffic and parking recommendations in a special, focused consultation, the OSU planners ignored almost the entire report because it did not suit the ideology. The planners on other occasions had treated reports from this firm as gospel. This is all part of a public record.

When faculty and occasionally other members of the University community would object to the systematic shrinking of oncampus faculty parking, the planners would show slides of small colleges or drawings or pictures that were misleading, chiefly because the changes always showed sunny, warm weather, when being a pedestrian can be pleasant. The fact of course is that Columbus weather is often very unpleasant, especially during the school year. Faculty carrying boxes of exams and papers do not appreciate walking long distances to class. And one need not mention students about whom planners claim they are so solicitous. The planners absolutely refused to consider weather-proof walking arrangements for their idealized pedestrians.

At one public meeting when a faculty member confronted the planners, one planner’s comment was made—very seriously!—that it was good for the health of the faculty to walk. There was just no consciousness of what has been required of competitive researchers and teachers for three generations. Indeed, sometimes the administrators’ contempt for faculty would come out inadvertently. For example, at one point, when some building project was going to close one of the main access roads for a period of time, an administrator said (for publication) that there would be no problem for the University because no one would be inconvenienced except some faculty members (whose function obviously was not important).

As parking moved to perimeter garages, the administrators took advantage of a new situation to attain their long-sought-after goal: giving staff the same “privileges” as faculty. Students, of course, did not play into the equation except as they were charged for parking in mostly distant spaces. At one point the editors of the *Lantern* got into trouble because they systematically surveyed the members of the University Board of Trustees who officially (at the instance of administrators) instituted the schedule of parking fees. The editors found that no trustee who owned or managed a business charged employees for parking. (As far as I know from a small sample, this situation still obtains.) In this case, the business model clearly was not a good one for the University to follow.

I calculated how much longer each day it took me to get from my car to my office when we were moved to perimeter garages. Each week, the time added up to more than an hour. At the end of the year, that meant more than 52 working hours were lost, i.e., more than a full week for an office worker. Business extremists do not make that kind of computation. They cannot understand that faculty are not 8-to-5 and that when their time is wasted, it is time lost to the University.

It is difficult to convey how powerfully the ideology has been that the University is not a workplace. The most flagrant recent example was when the Oval was redesigned by well-meaning University landscape architects. It turned out that it escaped the planners that there had to be handicap parking! So far was the idea of the campus as a site of production suppressed in the planning office—and not caught by anyone higher up.

The administrators who constituted the culture of envy and ideology were often in other capacities supportive staff members, good to work with in the everyday. They just could not escape the culture.

Fast forward to 2012. A new vice president comes in dedicated to privatizing. What is the first big item? Campus parking. The old culture was still working. When resistance showed up, the “campus” had to be “educated.” When a committee was finally appointed, how many members represented the faculty? One. And there were still constant vague claims that “the faculty” had been consulted. The Provost refused to stand up for his faculty. Public meetings were held to propagandize “the university public,” not to hear any ideas outside of the prescribed discussion terms. Indeed, too much opposition to top-level policies is known to generate retaliation.

Just as in the 1970s, one can see a crisis conceptualized by administrators—the financial crisis—used to excuse getting at what was left of a faculty perk. Why not just cut salaries and be done with it? Once out of control of the University, sooner or later faculty parking would become a suppressed part of the past. Everybody knows that. The idea that parking was a faculty recruiting device making for an attractive workplace for high-powered researchers and teachers, for example, is lost on administrators who distance themselves as much as possible from faculty, whom they consider just troublesome employees. The administrators would prefer more groundskeepers.

The current proposal is shaped entirely by those who decided on it. Even the two faculty members who provided an economic analysis of parts of it envision “customers” as the economic players—not valued workers in a workplace. And the idea of charging what the traffic will bear permeates that report.

The whole discussion has been framed by the proposers, who at the most identify pressure groups—specific employee groups or student groups—not the University as such. Similarly the promises of how the supposed profit will be spent are characterized in suggestions that attract interest groups on campus—and carefully stated so that there are no commitments. Instead there is an underlying hysteria about the need for marketing and profit making. It is not a worthy production for a university. And it avoids the intangibles and overdeterminations suggested in the history of campus parking.

The story is told that when General Eisenhower was placed as president of Columbia University until he could be nominated for president, his staff suggested that he have lunch with one of the great Nobel Prize winning physicists at Columbia. Eisenhower resisted the idea. When he was told he really should meet the Nobelist, his comment was, “I am of course always happy to meet with any employee of the University.”

Faculty parking is not just a matter of managing employees on a cash basis.

--John Burnham, Faculty Emeritus