

Parking is a necessary component of access to town forests. The following considerations are intended to guide communities in the construction of new or the improvement of existing parking lot.

- **The committee should think carefully about the desired capacity of the parking area.** The number of spaces should correspond with the volume of expected forest users to the extent possible. In recreation-based applications, we typically see an average vehicle occupancy of a little less than 2 people per vehicle (1.6 - 1.8 persons per vehicle on average). If the site constraints limit the size of the parking lot below the expected number of users, the committee should consider additional trailhead parking areas. If parking needs are underserved, visitors will typically park wherever they can find space. Forest visitors parking outside the designated area can have negative impacts on vegetation, adjacent neighbors, and orderly circulation.
- **Trailhead parking areas should be at least standard widths.** A typical parking space is 10' by 20'. For single loaded parking (one row of cars), the lot should be between 40' to 44' wide, to enable cars to back out easily. For double-loaded lots (two rows of vehicles), the lots should be between 60' and 64' wide. For a single loaded lot, consider marking the side of the lot intended for parking with signage. The lot should be a rectangle as irregular shapes result in less orderly and efficient parking.
- **Consider existing water drainage patterns when choosing a location and designing a new parking lot.** Construct the parking lot above the path of run-off and swales, ditches, and culverts should be utilized, as needed, to direct run-off away from the parking lot.
- **While town forest parking lots are generally dirt or gravel, some may be paved.** For longevity and sustainability, parking lots should include a uniform "compacted aggregate" (gravel) surface with sufficient cross-pitch (2% minimum) to prevent puddling. Gravel parking lots that are properly constructed with compacted aggregates (with fines) over a stone base and geotextile fabric will typically be more durable and require less maintenance than dirt lots.
- **There should be signage on the road that directs vehicles to the trailhead/parking lot.** An initial sign should be a few hundred yards from the parking lot to alert traffic about the upcoming turn/trailhead. Place another sign ~50' from the parking lot to alert traffic of the turn.
- **If reasonably accessible trails exist, handicap spaces should be provided as well.**

- Needs for larger vehicles such as school buses, campers, or horse or snowmobile trailers **should also be considered**. If possible, two entrances into the parking lot should be provided to allow large vehicles to “pull-through” rather than have to turn around in the lot.