

PAGE DESIGN/MAXIMO WIESE

Who Gets the Space? PARK(ing) Day Puts People First

By KATHERINE GUSTAFSON

What is more important: temporary lodging for two empty cars, or a vibrant community space fostering conversation and connection? On Sept. 19, University of Puget Sound Sustainability Services posed that question in the most literal way possible. Outside Seward Hall, reclaimed couches replaced cars, rugs covered pavement, and coffee tables anchored an outdoor living room that occupied two parking spots. This wasn't vandalism or a prank — it was the campus's first Park(ing) Day, a worldwide event challenging how we think about urban space. Little known to those outside of the sustainability industry, Park(ing) Day calls for community spaces to be set up in parking spots, particularly in urban areas, to shine a light on the municipal space wasted in accommodating (usually) single-passenger cars. These temporary spaces are called parklets and are part of a movement to create micro acts of joy and resistance against city infrastructure that prioritizes commerce over community, according to their website. The requirements for a Park(ing) Day installation are simple: Add a rug or turf to cover the pavement, pay for and enclose the parking space, and host an activity or event.

Lexi Brewer, Director of Sustainability Services, found out about the event concept by participating in one. Her first job following graduate school was

with Futurewise, a Seattle nonprofit that advocated for sustainable transit. "I also had friends who were Transit Planners, and tagged along to Park(ing) Day. It's something that I've remembered since, and attended a few times in Tacoma, so I was excited about the prospect of putting it on here," Brewer said.

The first annual Park(ing) Day at the University of Puget Sound was put on in collaboration with KUPS. Students did homework, read, or just chatted over the music. The event offered free ice cream, a whiteboard to doodle on and a space to relax in the sun. While it appeared to be a good time, the reach of the sustainable messaging to the student

"I also had friends who were Transit Planners, and tagged along to Park(ing) Day. It's something that I've remembered since, and attended a few times in Tacoma, so I was excited about the prospect of putting it on here

body is unclear. In terms of sustainability outreach, the event featured posters with overviews of Pierce County public transport maps and offerings. Campbell Preston ('27) attended the event and learned that it was a national movement. "I had no idea that this was happening across the country. So that was exciting," she said. When asked about other takeaways, she said she noticed the posted information on bus routes — although it was information that she was already familiar with.

The concrete impacts of this event are under-researched. In terms of direct outcomes of Park(ing) Day nationally, Brewer

hypothesizes that it is a jump-off point to get people to reconsider the urban landscapes that surround them. "The way cities are built and the allotted space for parking is intentional. It was designed for a purpose, and whether people know it or not, that purpose can be changed," she said.

The event may also direct attention toward the new "Home in Tacoma" Zoning and Standards package, which allows for a broader range of housing types in Tacoma neighborhoods. The change could allow developers to increase the number of units on a property without expanding the required parking lots to match. That means it's now permissible for a lot zoned for four units to only have two parking spaces. Though it's an inconvenience for some, this law was passed in hopes of encouraging residents to utilize public transit or other alternatives to car-based travel. Or, that space once zoned for parking spots could instead be used for trees, landscaping or affordable housing.

Park(ing) Day at The University of Puget Sound may have been a modest first step, but its significance extends beyond free ice cream and sunny conversations. While the event's immediate impact on student awareness remains uncertain, it represents something larger: An invitation to reimagine the spaces we inhabit daily. Whether this temporary parklet sparked lasting reflection on urban design or simply offered a moment of respite, it opened a dialogue about the intentional — and changeable — nature of our built environment.



A plexiglass board with doodles and suggested alternatives to driving. Photo credit: Jay Stafford // The Trail



Attendees gather in a parking space. Photo credit: Jay Stafford // The Trail