

Constant Controversy: Alternate-Side Street Parking

written by Carla Swerman
La Crosse Public Library Staff
March 2020

Signs of spring are enthusiastically welcomed: melting patches of snow, flowering crocuses, warmer breezes through open windows, and more daylight hours. Many city of La Crosse residents are even jubilant about the reprieve from alternate-side street parking. Some believe that the practice should be completely parked while others are cautious about applying brakes to a regulation that has merit.



A winter street scene in the 1000 block of Vine Street in March 1956. Photo courtesy of the La Crosse Public Library Archives.

La Crosse's alternate-side parking ordinance has always been contentious. The controversy started in 1957 with one alderman who was concerned about the cleanliness of La Crosse's streets. According to an April 17, 1958, *La Crosse Tribune* letter to the editor, Hubert J. Schleiter had contacted Milwaukee officials to learn about their parking ordinance since he considered Milwaukee's streets to be clean.

Schleiter, an attorney, then drafted an ordinance for La Crosse. It prohibited parking for more than 60 minutes between midnight and 8 AM in the downtown district from Front to 7th streets and from Cass to Vine streets. On all other city streets, during that same time frame, vehicles would have to park on the even side of a street on an even calendar day and on the odd side on odd calendar days. Naturally, streets where parking was only permitted on one side would be exempt from the even/odd requirement.

The rationale? The ordinance would allow the street department to sweep or plow one side of the street one night and the other side, the next night. Crews could then complete the work more safely, more efficiently, and more effectively.

While the city council anticipated a large turnout at a public hearing on the ordinance, not a single person showed up on Sept. 10, 1957. But, two days later, when the city council itself met, many aldermen objected to the ordinance and proposed several amendments. At a November meeting, with a 12-7 vote, the council approved a modified ordinance that would make the even/odd parking effective from 11:59 PM to 6 AM each day and would exempt the months of June, July, and August.

Two days later, on a Saturday afternoon, Mayor Milo Knutson vetoed the council's action. He contended that the ordinance would be difficult to enforce because the public would be confused by it. Knutson also maintained that Schleiter's proposal had been modified so much that it would not result in the desired benefits. Still, Schleiter – and others – continued to advocate for alternate-side street parking.



Veto Sustained

RESOLUTION ADOPTED
DEC 12 1957
BY COUNCIL

City of La Crosse, Wisconsin

MAYOR'S OFFICE
MILTON G. KNUTSON, MAYOR

November 23, 1957

65-1715
0086/4

To the Members of the Common Council
of the City of La Crosse
La Crosse, Wisconsin

Gentlemen:

At the evening session of November 19, 1957, of the adjourned regular meeting of November 14, 1957, of the Common Council, an ordinance to repeal section 9.155 (2) of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse, entitled "All Night Parking" was enacted.

The intent of this repealing ordinance as introduced originally by Alderman Hubert Schleiter was to expedite all forms of night time street cleaning and maintenance.

However, in the process of enactment, Alderman Schleiter's ordinance was amended in a manner and to an extent, such as to leave it confusing to the public, thereby making its effective enforcement, difficult and improbable.

On November 21st, Alderman Schleiter stated to me that he felt that the amended ordinance as enacted, to which he had given only qualified approval, would not yield the full results intended by his original ordinance. Subsequently, we discussed the various approaches to the problem of improving the efficiency of night time street cleaning and maintenance, and it was felt that a reconsideration of the problem was in order.

Alderman Schleiter has in mind certain alternative proposals which he will present to the Council, regarding street cleaning, which would provide greater convenience to the public and yet be more flexible in meeting the needs of the highway department.

For the foregoing reasons, and to facilitate reconsideration, I do hereby veto the attached legislation.

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
LA CROSSE, WIS.
Received and filed

NOV 23 1957 3:30 P.M.

Oliver A. Nelson
My Clerk.

Very truly yours,
Milo G. Knutson
Mayor of the City of La Crosse

Resolution #19200 from La Crosse Series 017 La Crosse, Wisconsin, Common Council Resolutions and Reports. The La Crosse Public Library Archives is the official repository for all historic city of La Crosse records and proceedings. Mayor Milo Knutson's veto, a letter of explanation, is part of the collection.

What evolved since then is chronicled here:

April 1958: Parking in the downtown district was limited to one hour between midnight and 8 AM. In addition, no vehicle could be parked on improved streets any longer than 24 hours.

May 14, 1959: The city council voted 14-6 in favor of year-round odd/even parking between midnight and 8 AM on two-way streets outside of the downtown district. Enforcement began the week of May 31. Police issued 1,426 warning tickets between midnight that Monday and Tuesday morning.



"1,426 See Red After Parking on Wrong Side" from the *La Crosse Tribune*, June 2, 1959 p. 1.

As reported in this June 2, 1959, *La Crosse Tribune* article, police issued 1,426 warning tickets the first night of alternate-side street parking. This could indicate that some La Crosse residents were not aware of the new ordinance, some needed a better understanding of the ordinance, and some may have opted for a warning ticket in lieu of the inconvenience of moving a vehicle.

May 1961: Alderman Frank Kaufmann proposed that alternate-side parking be revoked from June 1 to September 1. Yet, other council members advocated for an entire repeal of the ordinance. When voting, both options fell short by one vote.

December 1961: Despite claims from residents who were parked correctly and still got plowed in by street crews, the Common Council voted 12-9 to continue with alternate-side street parking.

October 1963: Another resolution to repeal the ordinance was defeated 15-6.

August 1970: Council member Donald Medinger argued that the ordinance was merely a way to raise revenue and should only be enforced during the winter months. His motion failed, 11-8.

May 1971: With “the repealer proposal almost as perennial as mosquito control,” according to the May 11, 1971, *La Crosse Tribune*, the city council upheld alternate-side street parking on a voice vote. A motion to halt the regulation during daylight savings time was rejected with a 14-6 vote.

October 1975: The city council was deadlocked on a proposal to limit alternate-side parking from May 1 to Oct. 31 and only Sunday through Thursday nights when street crews were typically working.

April 1980: The La Crosse Common Council’s Judiciary and Administration Committee refused to lift the alternate-side street parking ordinance over the summer months, as proposed by alderman Joseph Addis.

September 1982: A proposal to allow parking on both sides of the street from April through November was defeated 18-3. The reasoning was that visitors/tourists are not aware of the all-year alternate-side street parking ordinance and that the only purpose the regulation serves during “summer” months is to garner revenue from parking tickets.

Nov. 1984: Due to a petition by Myron Boland, a Myrick Park concessionaire, La Crosse residents voted 12,449 to 4,104 in an advisory referendum to limit alternate-side parking to May 1 to Nov. 1. The change went into effect in May 1, 1985.

Headlines from the *La Crosse Tribune* newspaper during the winter season of 1984-1985 included:

- ✓ “Alternate parking to get voters’ view” Nov. 2, 1984
- ✓ “Change in parking backed by city voters” Nov. 7, 1984
- ✓ “Alternate-side parking to end” April 30, 1985

The compromised that was reached ultimately resulted in alternate-side street parking for half the year. Alas! The alternate side parking controversy continued and still continues today.

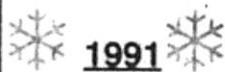
June 1990: A proposal to remove yet another month – April – from alternate-side parking was defeated with a 14-3 vote.

May 1991: A year later, without any discussion, the city council voted 12-5 in favor of that change. A three-year cumulative record of only 2.5 inches of snow in April was cited. An article in the May 6, 1991, *La Crosse Tribune* included a graphic highlighting the lack of snowfall as a good reason to suspend April from alternate-side street parking.

Debate: alternate-side parking dates

The La Crosse Common Council will debate parking dates at its meetings Tuesday and Thursday.

April snows



1991

9th Trace
12th 2.5 in.

1990

1st Trace
2nd Trace
5th Trace
6th Trace
10th Trace

1989

1st Trace
8th Trace
9th Trace

National Weather Service



Parking calendar

Dates used around the region:

La Crosse	Nov. 1-May 1
Onalaska	Nov. 1-April 1
Sparta	Dec. 1-April 1
Tomah	Nov. 1-April 1
Black River Falls	Dec. 1-April 1
Prairie du Chien	Nov. 15-April 1
Eau Claire	Nov. 1-May 1
Winona	Nov. 1-April 1

Monthly ticket totals 1989-90

Nov.	8,412	Feb.	5,773
Dec.	4,460	March	6,911
Jan.	5,893	April	9,386

Total tickets 1985-90

Other months	196,807
April	40,063

Night tickets issued in April make up 20% of the total over 6 years.

1991 figures not completed

Source: City of La Crosse

Kevin McGrath of the Tribune staff

"Heat Builds to End Alternate Parking in Snow-rare April," La Crosse Tribune, May 6, 1991, p. A-1

September 2009: To help alleviate parking problems in the UW-La Crosse area, the city council approved a pilot program proposed by first-year alderman Eric Schmidt. Outside of snow emergencies, parking would be allowed on both sides of the street for the area bound by 22nd Street, West Ave., La Crosse Street, and Main Street. Despite numerous violations, the council granted a continuance as long as Schmidt implemented some changes. In Sept. of 2012, the

council agreed to extend the program through the fall of 2013 when a new campus parking ramp would ease parking congestion.

January 2013: With only one dissenting vote, the La Crosse Common Council voted to triple the \$10 fine (\$30 for a first offense) for failure to switch sides during a 48-hour “snow dispersal period.” Vehicles in non-compliance could also be towed.

May 2014: As part of some drastic changes to reduce the amount of “commuter parking” on city streets, the Neighborhood Revitalization Committee proposed that alternate-side street parking be year-round from 11 PM to 7 AM. The entire campaign met with objection.

May 2016: Council member Gary Padesky proposed shortening alternate-side parking from Nov. 15 to March 15 since snowfall of any significance was unlikely Nov. 1- Nov. 15 and March 15-April 1. His proposal failed on a 9-7 vote.

November 2016: La Crosse resident Chris Browning started an online petition calling for alternate-side parking to commence at the time of the first snowfall each year and to be enforced only when it snows.

July 2017: The La Crosse Common Council removed the original (1959) business district exemption from alternate-side parking.

September 2017: On a 10-2 vote, Padesky’s 2016 proposal was approved.

June 2018: Based upon recommendations from the parking utility, alternate-side street parking will now be enforced from 12:01 AM to 5 AM rather than 1 AM to 6 AM, which had been the case for about 40 years. It could also be enforced any time the National Weather Service predicts three or more inches of snow outside of Nov. 15 to March 15.

This history indicates that this controversy may not ever decelerate. After all, as indicated by *La Crosse Tribune* articles throughout the ordinance's 60+-year history, the arguments – good and bad – have stayed constant:

BENEFITS	CONCERNS
Greater cleanliness of city streets makes La Crosse more inviting to newcomers or visitors	Can take tourists, guests, and new La Crosse residents by surprise and create an unfavorable impression of the city
Easier and safer for street crews to plow, sweep, and spray efficiently and effectively	Can be confusing, especially at first, and sometimes hard to determine the calendar day and the odd vs. even side
Easier for emergency vehicles, buses, and snow plows to navigate	Wastes time and money for those who park on the street, but regularly walk, bike, or ride the bus
Safer travel, especially on narrow streets, with streets being wider by one car width	Wastes gas when operating a vehicle just to move it to the opposite side of the street
Fewer cars boxed in by snow plowing efforts and fewer cars that have to be shoveled out	Hard on engines when merely moving a vehicle during extreme cold temperatures
Faster snow removal, which benefits motorists after a major snowfall	Inconvenient, especially if one has to awaken and bundle up to move a vehicle
Easier to spot abandoned and stolen cars	Limited street parking in the downtown area and near college campuses adds to the inconvenience
Fewer nighttime accidents with drivers backing into parked cars	Inadequate street parking near duplexes and homes that have been converted into apartments
Less depreciation of properties that would be surrounded by parked cars every single day	One side of the street may not provide ample parking spaces and/or as many as the other side
Less long-term parking on the streets	Additional work for the police/parking utility to enforce
More revenue that can be used to fund other city expenses	Merely a way for the City of La Crosse to make money (Originally, tickets were \$1; now, \$15.)

No matter a person's opinion of alternate-side street parking, most everyone would agree that the shorter time span (only four months) and duration (only five hours) have been an improvement. That's something that should pick up most La Crosse residents' pace.

While cruising into spring, consider a stop at the La Crosse Public Library at 800 Main St. to discover the history of another city ordinance. Rest assured that if it happens to pertain to parking, such as the use of parking meters or payment in parking ramps, its history is just as contentious as alternate-side street parking.

Alternative Side Street Parking *La Crosse Tribune* Clippings

August 10, 1970: "Aldermen Reject Repeal of Night Parking Law"

April 30, 1980: "Council committee opts for multiple parking fine"

May 6, 1980 (p. 6?): "What Tribune readers say: Parking Law"

Sept. 27, 1981 (p. 1): "Alternate parking creates problems"

Sept. 10, 1982 (p. 1): "Alternate side parking all year called unneeded"

Nov. 2, 1984 (p. 14): "Alternate parking to get voters' view"

Nov. 7, 1984 (P.15): "Change in parking backed by city voters"

April 30, 1985 (p. A): "Alternate-side parking to end"

May 1, 1988 (p. 1): "Parking fines pile up, even if snow doesn't"

June 16, 1990 (p. A4): "Parking rules to remain same"

May 6, 1991(p. A1): "Heat builds to end alternate parking in snow-rare April"

April 4, 2008 (p. A1): "Alternate-side tickets up: Blizzard of parking fines due to near-record snowfall"

July 28, 2009 (p. A2): "Parking Reprieve: Council to study alternate-side parking test for UW-L area"

Sept. 9, 2011 (p. B2): "'Snow emergency' for alternate-side parking"

Oct. 6, 2011 (p. A1): "Reprieve still alive for UW-L parking"

Oct. 14, 2011 (p. B2): "Council says no to buying laptops"

Sept. 14, 2012 (p. B1): "Council approves sign rules"

Jan. 9, 2013 (p. A3): "Stricter parking rules for snow removal"

Jan. 11, 2013 (p. B1): "Stiffer fines for alternate side parking violations"

April 1, 2014 (p. A6): Alternate side night parking ends

May 4, 2016 (p. A1): "Committee supports sober living facility"

July 15, 2017 (p. A1): "Council adopts paring changes"

June 15, 2018: "City council approves \$49.2 million La Crosse Center concept, new parking rules, North Side land swap"

Nov. 10, 2018: "Alternate-side parking descends on La Crosse area"

Nov. 15, 2016 (p. A1): "New side to alternate-side? La Crosse man petitions for change"

Sept. 15, 2017 (p. A1): "Recovery Center delayed"

Oct. 22, 2017 (p. D5): "Parking rules should aid plows, not revenue" (letter to editor)

Oct. 31, 2017 (p. A2): "Alternate-side parking begins Nov. 1 – except in La Crosse"

Nov. 14, 2017 (p. A6): "Alternate-side parking begins Wednesday"

March 14: 2020 (p. C1): Alternate-side parking will end on Sunday

March 18, 2020 (p. B4): "More alternate-side tickets issued during the winter so far"

Jan. 7, 2021 (p. A1): "Alt-side parking changes sought"

Jan. 16, 2021 (p. A1): "City shows 'resilience, strength'"