

Public Works – Engineering Division

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MEMO

TO: Anthony Brown – City Administrator

FROM: Alex Damien, P.E., Director – Department of Public Works
Brandon Schwenn, P.E., – Deputy Director/City Engineer

DATE: June 9, 2025

RE: South St. Ramp Condition and Action Plan

Background

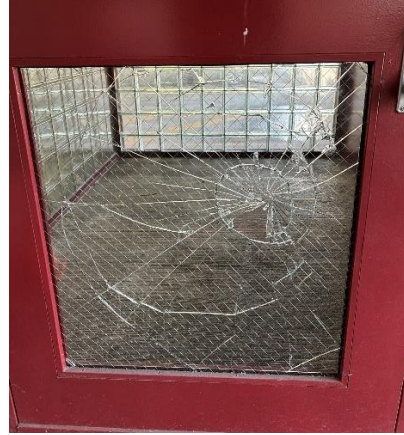
The City currently maintains and operates a municipal parking structure/ramp at 241 South St. This parking structure contains approximately 450 parking spaces and is utilized by various Downtown businesses, residents, patrons and visitors. Unfortunately, there recently has been an increased level of condition issues, vandalism and not permitted occupation of the parking ramp.

Existing Concerns

Vandalism

There has been an abundance of graffiti and other vandalism around the parking ramp including broken glass on doors, broken glass block, spray painted cameras, and other various damage. Below are some example photos, but are not exhaustive of all areas:





In addition to the above vandalism examples, there also has been a high frequency of intentional fire extinguisher discharges around the ramp, including on the 4th floor and stairwells. This causes the need to replace and recharge the extinguishers to meet appropriate fire codes for the facility. The replacement and recharging of fire extinguishers that are intentionally discharged is a large annual expense to the City.

Occupation of Common Areas

Mostly during the colder months of the year, multiple individuals have been inhabiting the stairwells and other common areas of the parking ramp. These individuals typically remain in the ramp during the overnight hours and leave around the time that the City staff members arrive in the morning. These individuals unfortunately leave debris, garbage and bio-hazard type messes while occupying the space. This creates a cleanliness issue and safety concerns for anyone using the ramp and also requires the usage of a specialized cleaning company to remove the bio-hazard waste. The 3rd party cleaning service is another high expense for the City when utilized.

Camera System Coverage/Access

Historically the security camera system at the South St. ramp was isolated on a closed system that could not be accessed by other City departments, including Police Dispatch. As of recently, IT has worked with their camera vendor to switch the South St. ramp camera system over to the City's Avigilon system. The security cameras at the ramp can now be accessed remotely. Unfortunately, the camera system does not fully cover all aspects of the parking ramp. Currently, cameras are installed and operational at each floor of the South St. (north side) stairwell, the 4th floor, and the 2 entrances. There are no cameras currently installed along the Wisconsin Avenue stairwell which is one of the primary locations that is frequently inhabited by individuals.

Considerations/Strategies to Address Concerns

CIP Projects and Various Maintenance

It is planned to complete various maintenance tasks around the ramp structure to address vandalism and graffiti. The below projects already have contractors or staff lined up and have either been completed or will be completed early this summer:

- Replacement of remaining broken door window glass with Lexan (plexiglass)

- Large scale replacement of glass block areas with concrete block which can no longer be broken. Some glass block will be left to allow light to pass through, however, hopefully out of reach from easy vandalism.
- Widespread painting of graffitied areas by City staff with a paint sprayer.
- Fire extinguishers are to be replaced on an as needed basis, however, they will be replaced at a rate that reduces the threat of immediate vandalism.
- Cleaning of any remaining vandalism areas that cannot be painted because of the surface; utilizing a contractor if not able to complete with internal City staff.

Coordination with Waukesha Police Department

DPW and Waukesha Police Department staff conducted a coordination meeting on 3/20/2025 to discuss the current issues and strategies to assist with the state of the parking ramp. The meeting was very positive and multiple strategies were brainstormed. Some of these items are explained below. The police department also will be increasing their ramp presence and checks, especially when new Community Resource Officer staff are fully available. The additional checks and presence have historically shown success at the City's other parking structure (Transit Ramp).

Increase Camera Coverage at South St. Ramp + PD Dispatch Monitoring

While having the existing security system now on the City's main system is a large positive, there still is an abundance of improvement that can be made. DPW staff will be working directly with PD and IT staff to increase the camera coverage around the South St. Ramp to the greatest extent possible. The first area that will look to be added will be the Wisconsin Avenue stairwell, as well as any other common areas that are typically inhabited in the winter months. While this will be an initial expense, there are CIP funds available for parking ramp maintenance that could be utilized to cover the cost. It was also suggested that additional signing be added around the ramp noting that the areas are under constant video surveillance.

The goal of the additional cameras would be to have coverage in all areas of the ramp and have the possibility of any potential vandalism to be viewed on the camera system. Hopefully this will be a large deterrent to the start of vandalism if there is more coverage.

Secondly, in working with PD, with the South St. camera system now being part of the Avigilon system, Police Dispatch now should have the ability to monitor the ramp cameras for suspicious activity, or inhabitants. While it will be a slight change from the indigo vision system that dispatch is used to, they will be working on making sure the Avigilon system is accessible on the dispatch center computers and monitors. If successful, the addition of camera coverage and increased observation by dispatch staff may lead to faster response time to vandalism and potentially notification of inhabitants that can be addressed by additional checks.

Addition of Security Guard Staff at South St. Ramp

Currently, there is no City security guard staff assigned to the South St. ramp. The only City employee coverage at the ramp is completed by the Municipal Parking Supervisor and Parking Clerk. This coverage only covers the hours of 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Monday through Friday. This leaves a very large gap of supervision of the facility outside of the normal business hours. Additional security guard staff or additional hours for the existing security guard staff is proposed for coverage at the South St. ramp. This could be started primarily as evening coverage to increase the presence of City staff around the facility. The goal would primarily be a deterrent for vandalism and inhabitants, which is the bulk of the current concerns with the facility.

While this would be an increase in staffing cost for the Parking Utility, it likely will be offset by a reduction in vandalism damage or bio-hazard cleaning calls on a regular basis. This strategy has shown success at the City's other parking ramp (Transit Center), which currently has evening and some weekend coverage with security guards. The additional presence of the guards has significantly reduced vandalism and unwanted inhabitants at the Transit Center ramp. The additional security guard(s) would also allow for reduced check time by police department staff and narrow the window of time in which PD checks would be made.

Conclusion

The current state of the South Street ramp is in a condition that needs to be addressed and DPW, PD and Parking Utility staff have plans in place to execute immediate action. There are also long-term goals and strategies that staff are working towards to allow the ramp to maintain proper condition once various repairs and improvements are completed. It is currently anticipated to have the ramp improvement projects and cleanup efforts completed by the end of June. A goal timeframe of the end of summer/early fall for the installation of additional cameras is be targeted.