

How to Fix Parking Problems

We have a lot to learn from Donald Shoup

By Mark Schnell



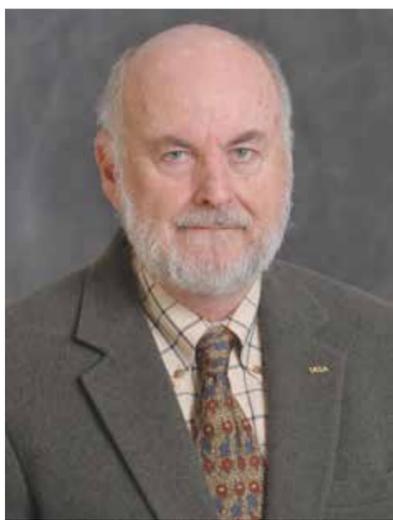
In honor of the “rock star of parking” visiting Seaside in the near future, it’s time to look again at the issues surrounding parking.

“Rock star of parking” may seem like a questionable nickname. After all, how can one be both a rock star (or maybe superstar, for a better term) and an expert in the supposedly mundane subject of parking? The answer is surprisingly simple: make people think differently about an important subject that affects nearly all of us. That’s exactly what Donald Shoup has done, and that’s why he’s the rock star of parking.

Dr. Donald Shoup is Distinguished Research Professor of Urban Planning at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. He is the author of two influential books on the subject of parking: “The High Cost of Free Parking,” which was published in 2005, and “Parking and the City,” which was published this year.

In “The High Cost of Free Parking,” and in many speaking appearances since then, Shoup made three primary recommendations: local governments should eliminate off-street parking requirements, charge fair market prices for on-street parking, and spend the revenue to benefit the metered neighborhoods.

Shoup’s approach has jump-started a nationwide movement to reconsider parking regulations. One by one, communities are implementing his recommendations. Some communities implement all



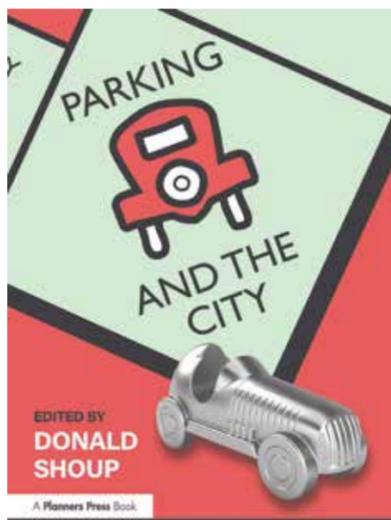
Donald Shoup and his book *Parking and the City*

of them, and others implement some of them. Some local governments have changed parking policies for certain areas — often their historic downtowns.

Should the Walton County government, as well as some of the county’s larger communities, implement his recommendations? Absolutely. It’s at least worth a try. I think we’ll find that it’s a much better way to regulate parking.

There is an idea about parking that seems to be engrained in the American psyche (or, more specifically, the American psyche outside of our most dense cities): people think that a parking space should always be open and available to them at every destination. (And, of course, it should be located directly in front of the door.) I’m exaggerating, but only slightly. This expectation shapes the way that we regulate parking, and those regulations have had a terrible effect on our communities.

This effect is most pronounced in a place like Seaside. I’m perpetually



amazed at a driver’s response when they can’t find a parking space. Never mind that they chose to visit a very popular place. Never mind that they visited at a busy time of day (such as early evening) or time of year (such as spring break). No, if one cannot find a parking space, then there is simply “not enough parking.”

I’m not trying to downplay the frustration one experiences when searching in vain for a parking space. It’s not fun, and it’s fair to be disappointed. But here’s the thing: you don’t have a God-given right to a parking space.

So what constitutes “enough” parking? This is the question that fuels the very imprecise parking minimums in place in most communities.

Government-mandated parking minimums on private land are based on the maximum parking scenario: the day of the year when the maximum number of cars will need to park in a given place. This is most infamously apparent at shopping malls, where the parking minimums target one day of the year: Black Friday, the biggest shopping day of the year. Most of that parking sits empty the rest of the year. It’s an incredibly wasteful policy, and it favors national chain retailers who can afford to build expensive parking lots versus the small businesses who cannot afford such an expense.

Most importantly, those giant empty parking lots prevent everyone involved from building a place that anyone wants to inhabit. They create a destructive cycle where pedestrians and cyclists abandon a place in favor of cars, and this of course, creates the need for more

parking. These “parking craters” (as they are called sometimes in our downtowns) nibble away at the edges of good development, because nobody wants to spend any time within or adjacent to a giant parking lot.

And here’s the especially interesting part: Those shopping mall parking lots are not even full on Black Friday any more (and many, if not most, never were). This is, in part, because people are not spending as much time or money in malls. Retail is changing, with more and more people shopping either online or in mixed-use Main Streets where the experience is much better.

The places that are extremely popular and desirable are almost always those without giant parking lots. They are the great walkable mixed-use streets and neighborhoods. These places find ways to spread out the parking in a less offensive way: on-street parking for the most part, along with small parking lots. The design of Seaside is a model for how to do this. The major concentrations of parking around Central Square and Smolian Circle feel more like streets than parking lots. Residential parking is largely in the form of on-street parking and narrow driveways.

Several communities around the country, including fast-growing Seattle, have eliminated parking minimums in certain areas or circumstances.

So, if the plan is to park more cars on the street, or in public parking lots and structures, what are people doing in these popular places to deal with the flood of drivers looking to park? In the most successful cases, they are doing exactly as Donald Shoup suggests.

Here’s one example: San Francisco has tested, and is now fully implementing, a demand-based system for on-street parking. In this system, parking meter rates go up or down based on demand. Meter rates run between 50 cents per hour and eight dollars per hour. The intention is to encourage faster turnover in crowded streets and areas, and push some of the drivers to use other parking that’s slightly less convenient. The goal of the demand pricing is to always have some available parking spaces. It helps to reduce the congestion caused by people circling to find a space. Interestingly, San Francisco found that average rates went down by 10 cents per meter, which is proof that the system was truly aimed at parking management rather than revenue generation.

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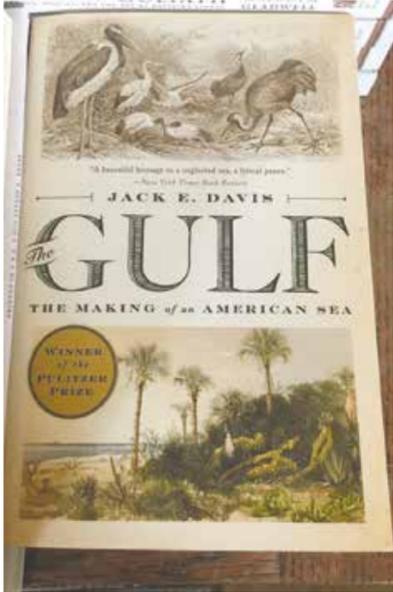
Holiday Books

Sundog Books offers clever gifts for book lovers

Special to the Seaside Times

The holidays are upon us. The Christmas spirit comes to life as the beautiful decorations adorn Seaside, shops prepare their holiday display windows and “Deck the Halls” plays on the radio.

Seaside’s famous bookstore, Sundog Books, is an ideal place for putting the happy in your holidays. We asked the staff at Sundog to recommend their favorite books of the season. Here are their picks:



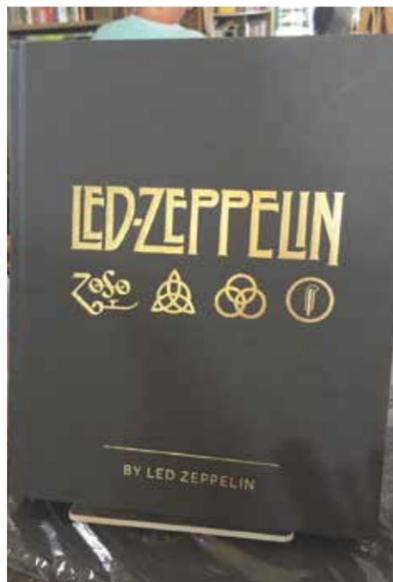
“The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea” by Jack E. Davis

Seaside’s Escape to Create artist-residency program alumnus Jack E. Davis reminds us that amidst the ruin, beauty awaits its return, as the Gulf is, and has always been, an ongoing story. Sensitive to the imminent effects of climate change, and to the difficult task of rectifying grievous assaults of recent centuries, “The Gulf” suggests how a penetrating examination of a single region’s history can inform the country’s path ahead.

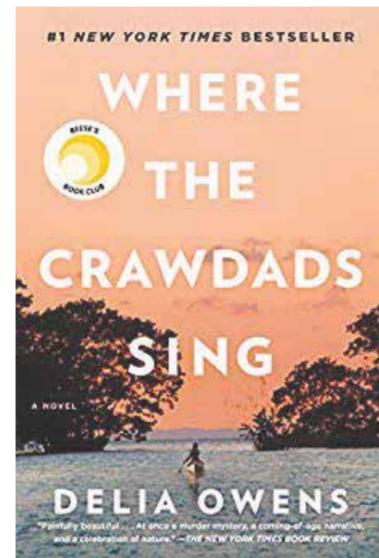
Davis is also the author of the award-winning “An Everglades Providence: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the American Environmental Century,” a dual biography of America’s premier wetlands and the woman who led the movement to save it.

“Led Zeppelin” by Led Zeppelin

A great gift book, “Led Zeppelin” is the first and only official illustrated book ever to be produced in full collaboration with the members of the band. Celebrating 50 years since their formation, this definitive 400-page volume charts the group’s unparalleled musical career from the very first performance in a tiny club, to their performance at London’s O2 Arena, when 20 million



fans broke the world record for highest demand for tickets for a single concert. The book features more than 300 photographs—many seen here for the first time — of Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Paul Jones and John Bonham from photographers around the world, and photographs from the band members’ personal collections. The band is seen on and off stage, in candid moments and in the recording studio. Accompanying the photographs is rare and unseen artwork from the Led Zeppelin archives, and fascinating documents and images from the Atlantic Records vaults.



“Where the Crawdads Sing” by Delia Owens

For years, rumors of the “Marsh Girl” have haunted Barkley Cove, a quiet town on the North Carolina coast. So in late 1969, when handsome Chase Andrews is found dead, the locals immediately suspect Kya Clark, the so-called Marsh Girl. But Kya is not what they say. Sensitive and intelligent, she has survived for years alone in the marsh that she calls home, finding friends in the gulls and lessons in the sand. Then the time comes when

she yearns to be touched and loved. When two young men from town become intrigued by her wild beauty, Kya opens herself to a new life —until the unthinkable happens.

Perfect for fans of Barbara Kingsolver and Karen Russell, “Where the Crawdads Sing” is at once an exquisite ode to the natural world, a heartbreaking coming-of-age story, and a surprising tale of possible murder. Owens reminds us that we are forever shaped by the children we once were, and that we are all subject to the beautiful and violent secrets that nature keeps.

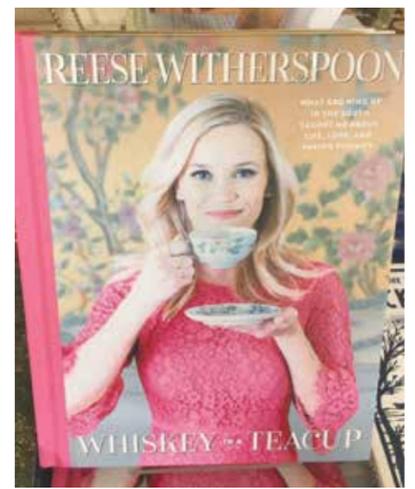


“South Toward Home: Adventures and Misadventures in My Native Land” by Julia Reed

In considering the pleasures and absurdities of her native culture, Julia Reed quotes another Southern writer, Willie Morris, who said, “It’s the juxtapositions that get you down here.” These juxtapositions are, for Julia, the soul of the South, and in her warmhearted and funny new book, “South Toward Home,” she chronicles her adventures through the highs and the lows of Southern life — taking us everywhere from dive bars and the Delta Hot Tamale Festival to an impromptu shindig on a Mississippi River sandbar and a coveted seat on a Mardi Gras float. She writes about the region’s music and food, its pesky critters and prodigious drinking habits, its inhabitants’ penchant for making their own fun — and, crucially, their gift for laughing at themselves.

With her distinctive voice and knowing eye, Reed also provides her take on the South’s more embarrassing characteristics from the politics of lust and the persistence of dry counties to the “seemingly bottomless propensity for committing a whole lot of craziness in the name of the Lord.” No matter what, she writes, “My fellow Southerners have brought me the greatest joy — on the page, over the airwaves, around the dinner table, at the bar or, hell, in the checkout line.” “South Toward Home,” with a

foreword by Jon Meacham, is Julia Reed’s valentine to the place she knows and loves best.



“Whiskey in a Teacup: What Growing Up in the South Taught Me About Life, Love and Baking Biscuits” by Reese Witherspoon

Academy Award-winning actress, producer and entrepreneur Reese Witherspoon invites you into her world, where she infuses the Southern style, parties and traditions she loves with contemporary flair and charm.

Witherspoon’s grandmother Dorothea always said that a combination of beauty and strength made Southern women “whiskey in a teacup.” We may be delicate and ornamental on the outside, she said, but inside we’re strong and fiery.

Witherspoon’s Southern heritage informs her whole life, and she loves sharing the joys of Southern living with practically everyone she meets. She takes the South wherever she goes with bluegrass, big holiday parties, and plenty of Dorothea’s fried chicken. It’s reflected in how she entertains, decorates her home, and makes holidays special for her kids — not to mention how she talks, dances and does her hair (in these pages, you will learn Witherspoon’s fail-proof, only slightly insane hot-roller technique). Reese loves sharing Dorothea’s most delicious recipes as well as her favorite Southern traditions, from midnight barn parties to backyard bridal showers, magical Christmas mornings to rollicking honky-tonks.

It’s easy to bring a little bit of Reese’s world into your home, no matter where you live. After all, there’s a Southern side to every place in the world, right? 🍷

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Urban Design

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Of course, parking has always been free in South Walton, so there would be some initial shock among visitors and residents of South Walton on the day they started to pay for parking. (It’s worth noting, too, that there’s really no such thing as free parking. We all pay for it indirectly when a business or residence is required to provide off-street parking.)

But, if it works as well as it has in San Francisco, I’m confident that people here would be willing to pay the cost. At some point, paying a dollar or two for parking beats circling and circling for a parking space. The details of such a system would need to be worked out, but it’s certainly viable for South Walton, or at least parts of it.

And thanks to Shoup’s third recommendation, the revenue could go back into improvements in the

immediate vicinity. The parking fees should fund new sidewalks, bike lanes, street trees, parks, and so on. The end result would be a more beautiful and livable place.

Thanks to my experiences as an urban designer, I can attest to the damaging effects of parking on our communities. The current requirements for parking truly drive urban form, and not in a positive way. Parking is a necessary evil, but it doesn’t need to wreak havoc. It’s time that we take some advice from the “rock star of parking” and make parking work better for all of us. 🍷

Mark Schnell is an urban designer based in Seagrove Beach. Among his most prominent projects are three New Urban beach communities on the Texas coast: Cinnamon Shore, Palmilla Beach, and Sunflower Beach. Learn more about his firm Schnell Urban Design at SchnellUrbanDesign.com.

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