Office of Transportation talks progress and pitfalls for university parking

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With few options for commuter parking and limited space to expand, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is restricted in how it can accommodate its commuter students, but that does not mean it'll be stuck this way forever.

According to Director of the Office of Transportation Services Stuart Glaeser, there are approximately 5400 parking spaces on UL Lafayette's campus, and 1858 of those spots are saved for faculty and staff, with 2392 spots being residential parking and the remaining 1150 spaces being commuter parking.

As Glaeser explained, UL Lafayette's lack of space to expand is its main issue when it comes to divvying up space for students to park.

"I mean that's our biggest issue — we're landlocked," Glaeser said. "And unfortunately, even if we had some land ... Girard Park Tower, I mean, that's a $20 million facility, and the debt service on that is $1.5 million every year until 2044 — that's what we pay for that garage every year."

Girard Park Tower provides the only commuter parking available to all students on campus, as well as the only visitation parking on campus outside of the Student Union's 30-minute parking.

The tower is divided between per-semester permit parking and meter parking. 939 students have purchased a parking pass for Girard Park Tower for the fall 2019 semester.

"In order for that garage to pay for itself, I would have to charge $1300 a year per space to pay that note payment on that garage," Glaeser added. "You can't hardly ask any student — or faculty, staff or anybody — to pay over a hundred dollars a month to park there. I mean ... they just don't have that capability."

Peyton Richard, senior art education major, is one of the students who use the meter parking in the first few floors of the tower. She said she doesn't park there every day, but most days it does come in handy for her as an art student.

"I take a bunch of art classes, so I have a lot of stuff to carry with me," Richard said. "So taking the shuttle every day is not an option. I have to park in the tower every day because you can't bring a giant portfolio on the bus with you ... so parking there is my best choice."

Glaeser added that, in the long term, the Office of Transportation Services will be looking at other, potentially better ways to get students to campus: "As a university if we continue to grow, and as new buildings and stuff get built ... looking down the road 10 years, 12 years, we've got to think about some sustainable parking or sustainable ways to get people here on campus or give them options to get to campus without having to park on campus," Glaeser said.

The options Glaeser discussed were more than just constructing another parking garage somewhere.

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Glaeser said he had never heard of anything like Lujan's case happening with the permit system in the past and was unsure how it happened in the first place.

He encouraged any students who may be having issues with their permits to reach out to the Office of Transportation Services in any way, be it through email, social media, or visiting the office in person.