

Royal Street Parking Lot

To form a parking lot, our congregation purchased three properties at 419, 425, and 427 South Royal Street in 1958. At the time of purchase, these lots were occupied by a two-story frame duplex residence and open space. The structures were removed and the lot paved in the summer of 1958. The low brick walls at either side of the entrance were added in 2005.

During the 1950s, most of the new residences then being built in Alexandria were added on to the periphery of previously developed areas, and property values in core areas were in relative decline. Local business leaders called for the then very much in vogue "urban renewal" of Old Town. A newspaper article that appeared when the congregation's plans for the lot were first announced reveals this sentiment — "The City Improvement Committee of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce voted last week to commend the Old Presbyterian Meeting House 'for its contribution to Alexandria's vital program of urban renewal' by purchasing and planning removal of a substandard building on South Royal Street." The post-World War II flight of residents and businesses to the suburbs was on, and the question raised about what to do about established but declining inner-city areas that were being "left behind".

The Meeting House, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Second Presbyterian Church, Beth El Hebrew Congregation, First Baptist Church, Alfred Street Baptist Church, and other Old Town congregations all had increasing numbers of members, who were among those moving to new suburban residences yet seeking convenient parking when attending events at their houses of worship. Along with many other Old Town institutions, some of these congregations decided to relocate to peripheral locations where parking was more easily accommodated. Others chose to remain in Old Town and do what they could to create additional parking spaces.

St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church removed its classroom building (built in 1858) from the corner of Royal and Wolfe streets and created space for automobiles to park there in 1950. St. Mary's also removed apartment buildings located to the north of the Meeting House on Fairfax Street to create a parking lot there in 1959. The congregation of First Baptist Church divided, with some members forming a new congregation and relocating to a new structure on suburban King Street in 1954, and some remaining at South Washington Street to form the new Downtown Baptist Church. The congregation of Alfred Street Baptist Church purchased the lot adjacent to its original sanctuary in 1956, and then considered relocating, but chose to remain in Old Town, to expand its facilities, and to create additional parking spaces. Beth El Hebrew Congregation relocated from North Washington Street to Seminary Road in 1957. Second Presbyterian Church, which had long considered relocating, began its efforts to move to Janney's Lane in earnest when its property was condemned for urban renewal in 1960.