

## Zipcar arrives in Salem: Company makes first foray onto North Shore

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Salem — The car-sharing company Zipcar has finally arrived on the North Shore, after setting up three sites in Salem.

Zipcar has grown exponentially since it was founded here in Massachusetts in 2000, but until now the company hasn't had much of a presence on the North Shore. The company has one site in Beverly, but it's located at Endicott College and intended mostly for faculty and students. The three sites that opened last week Salem — at the parking lots on Church Street, Crombie Street and Riley Plaza — are the first truly aimed at a city in this area.

Zipcar spokesman John Williams said there has long been interest in extending the company into Salem. The company received numerous requests from residents, including people who used the service in Boston and its adjacent cities and wanted a branch closer to home. Zipcar already has 150 members in Salem.

"It was a unique situation, because there were so many requests from people already living there, plus the partnership with the city made it possible," Williams said.

Salem's downtown environment made the company believe its business model would work here, Williams said, such as the proximity to the commuter rail and the vital, pedestrian-friendly retail activity.

"Zipcar took a look at the geography there ... and liked it," he said.

Zipcar's vehicles are sometimes stationed at private companies' parking lots, or on a city's off-street spaces, or in a municipal lot, as in Salem. William said some residents may not like seeing public parking spaces earmarked for a private company, but he hopes people will recognize the value of taking vehicles off the road through car-sharing.

"We absolutely enjoy seeing forward-thinking cities [like Salem]," Williams said. "There are cases where cities like to market it as a tenant amenity."

Zipcar representatives contacted Salem about seven months ago, said Jason Silva, chief aide to Mayor Kim Driscoll, and the city provided them a map of the downtown and its parking areas. Originally, Zipcar wanted to put its vehicles at the YMCA, Church Street and Riley Plaza parking lots, but the city's parking board vetoed the YMCA. The board approved Church Street and Riley Plaza, and added Crombie Street instead of the Y.

"We have a one-year agreement for them to use [the spots] for free, with the hope that they'll be able to build a success business here," Silva said. "And the model they've used in other communities they'll hopefully use here — which is that within a year or two they'll be able to pay for the spots."

Silva said providing free parking spaces isn't uncommon for cities and towns, and he even spoke to an official in another community that actually paid Zipcar to entice it to come into that city.

In addition to money Zipcar might be able to pay Salem in the future, Silva said the mayor supported the project because of the expected benefits to Salem — such as easing parking problems and reducing congestion and pollution in the downtown.

"We've been talking about it for quite while," Silva said. "Over the years we've received a lot of resident feedback about [the Mayor's Office] trying to attract Zipcar."

The Transportation Research Board found in a national 2005 study that for every "share" car like the ones from Zipcar, 15 private vehicles are taken off the roads. That figure carries weight for Tom Daniel, Salem's economic development manager, who has been working on parking issues in downtown Salem. He believes Zipcar can contribute to easing the city's parking problems.

"The great thing about Zipcar is ... for each car, it takes a certain number cars off the road," he said. "It's a really good fit in Salem, for people who live here and also people who work here."

Daniel expects the company will work out well for the many local residents who commute to work by train and don't use their car often, or have a one-car household but sometimes need a second vehicle.

There are two vehicles at each of the locations. A Honda Civic and Honda Insight hybrid are stationed on Church Street. On Crombie Street are a Mini Cooper and a Honda CRV, and at Riley Plaza's west lot is a Kia Soul and a Mazda 3.

Zipcar isn't ruling out the idea of adding cars to its Salem fleet, or to expanding to other North Shore communities.

"In Salem we'll watch the utilization," Williams said, "and as the demand increases, we'll look to support that."

*For more about Zipcar and joining its car-sharing program in Salem, visit [zipcar.com](http://zipcar.com).*

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