

## **Downtown Paid Parking Proposal**

Public parking spaces, whether on-street, in a garage or in a surface parking lot, are a valuable commodity for municipalities and should be managed in a way that supports the needs of residents, business owners and visitors alike. In line with that thinking, financial support for the upkeep and improvements to a parking system must also be considered.

Recent changes to the employment makeup in the downtown have highlighted the demand for easily accessible, all-day parking in close proximity to the Main St. corridor, especially in the City Hall parking lot. Downtown employers need to share in some of the responsibility in providing for parking spaces as is commonly seen in other parts of the City where there are minimal or no public parking spaces available. While some property owners do address their parking needs privately, many do not.

As an inventory of parking spaces is created, enforcement of the time limits and restrictions becomes a crucial element. Regular and active enforcement of parking regulations, especially in the 2 hour spaces where violations regularly occur, will need to occur.

Parking can be considered a utility and should be supported by those who are utilizing public spaces. As with any utility, investments back into the system should be made and this would provide the City with an opportunity to plan for and fund downtown parking maintenance and improvements.

The City currently has approximately 675 public parking spaces in the downtown area. The current allocation is approximately 300 All Day parking spaces and 375 two Hour parking spaces. Locations included in this total: Main St. Parking Lot, Beacon St. West Parking Lot, City Hall Parking Lot, City Hall Parking Lot by Belknap Mill, On-Street parking on Beacon St. East, Beacon St. West, Main St., Veteran's Square, Pleasant St, Canal St. and New Salem St. and the current available spaces in the Parking Garage.

This proposal would change the current downtown parking program to a paid permit system for parking needs greater than 2 Hours, up to and including All Day parking.

A monthly permit would be available for purchase from the City for \$50 (about \$2 per working day). This would allow the permit holder to park in any All Day parking space in the downtown. Permits are not tied to a specific parking space, just an All Day space in general. The City would look to initiate a program where permits can be renewed on a monthly basis through an automatic bank draft/credit card payment system. The City would also look to initiate a program where a business could purchase a certain quantity of permits for use with their employees for a 6 month/1 year period, paid in advance, at a discount.

The current 2 Hour spaces would remain free of charge under this proposal. Drivers utilizing 2 Hour spaces would need to move their vehicles before/when the 2 hours is up or be subject to a violation ticket. It is not permissible for a driver to move a car to another 2 Hour space and then another in order to park all day. Those drivers would be subject to a violation ticket.

The City would need to hire an employee(s) to perform parking enforcement activities on a year-round basis.

City Hall employees would be provided with a permit at no charge, allowing them to park either in the parking garage or at the far end of the City Hall parking lot along the Post Office wall or adjacent to the Riverwalk.

In conjunction with a paid parking system, the City should look to update several chapters of parking related ordinances. Staff's proposed changes would include increasing the fine for a violation of parking meter/permit parking from \$10 to \$25. The same increase is proposed for overnight on-street parking violations during the winter parking ban. We should also consider increasing the fine for parking on a sidewalk from \$25 to \$50.

The City currently has a regulation banning overnight on-street parking from midnight to sunrise in months outside of the winter parking ban. This is not enforced and has not been for many years. Also overnight parking in municipal parking lots is prohibited all year. A discussion should occur to determine whether we should enforce these regulations, modify them or remove them from our ordinances.

Under this proposal, a discussion should occur about the allocation of 2 Hour and All Day spaces in the parking garage in order to support the retail businesses on the ground floor. Of 116 available spaces on the first deck, staff would recommend that 25 spaces be available for 2 Hour parking. This is approximately 20% of the spaces. This allotment could be adjusted at any time as needed with a change of signage.

The distribution of All Day and 2 Hour spaces in the entire downtown area could also be adjusted at any time, depending on demand for parking permits.

A "void" in this proposal is what happens to people who need to occasionally park in the downtown area for a period longer than 2 hours. One can envision a need for people to sometimes park for 3 or 4 hours, or longer, while they transact business or work downtown.

A discussion should occur as to whether or not 2 hours is the appropriate limit for parking spaces and whether or not the first hours should be free of charge.

If the City were looking to charge customers for all parking during a regulated time period (9 am to 5 pm, M - F for example) then a Pay & Display parking kiosk system would need to be implemented. To cover all areas of the downtown parking district with kiosks, including the garage, we anticipate the need for 25-30 kiosks.

The City's upfront cost for kiosks will most likely be between \$200K - \$225K. The annual cost for operating the kiosks, to include the subscription fee for the web based software necessary to operate and manage the system and the parts maintenance program for each kiosk, would run \$30,000/year.

Under a paid permit system for All Day parking, if the City were to sell 225 monthly permits at \$50 each, the annual revenue would be \$135,000/yr.

The approximate cost of a full-time enforcement employee, with benefits, would be \$55,000/yr.

There are initial startup costs for signage, supplies for printing parking permits/parking stickers, handheld equipment for enforcement and probably a few more miscellaneous items. This could total \$15,000.

There would be additional staff time needed for issuing permits, accepting and reconciling payments, processing parking tickets and such. At this time, we do not anticipate this would require any additional staff.

If the city charged for all hours of parking through the use of a kiosk system, revenue would be greater than the \$135K listed above. That amount has not been estimated yet as there are unknown variables, including what the hourly charge would be and if there would be a two-tier pricing system in place for short-term vs. long-term parking.

It is likely that if a paid system is put into place, “parking creep” will occur. That is, people will find places to park just outside of the paid parking footprint and the City could be revisiting certain streets to apply “no parking” or other regulations.

The City Council should discuss using some of the net revenues toward parking improvements within the downtown district. We currently have ongoing costs at the parking garage for inspections/maintenance and the decision about what to do long-term with the garage still needs to occur. City Hall parking lot is in the CIP for next year and is in serious need of being completely reclaimed and paved. We anticipate this to cost approximately \$150,000. Other parking lots will need attention in the near future.

If there is consensus to move forward on some type of paid parking system, this matter could be assigned to the Government Operations and Ordinances Committee for further vetting and public input.

If any change is ultimately approved, we should look to amend the FY 2020 budget to reflect additional expenditures and revenue.

From the date of City Council approval of any significant change to the parking program, City staff would need a minimum of 90 days lead time for logistics and implementation of those changes.