

**JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION**  
**December 4, 2012**

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

**CALL TO ORDER:** 5:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:** City Commissioners present: Michael J. Winters, Bill Bronson, Fred Burow, Mary Jolley, and Robert Jones.

**STAFF PRESENT:** City Manager; Deputy City Manager; Interim City Attorney; Directors of Fiscal Services, Planning and Community Development, and Public Works; Deputy Planning Director; Police Chief; and the Deputy City Clerk.

**1. PARKING PROGRAM**

Deputy Planning Director Wendy Thomas provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Downtown Parking District. She introduced two members of the Parking Advisory Commission (PAC), Darren Brown and Charles Fulcher. The other members of the PAC are David Campbell and Phil Kiser.

Ms. Thomas noted that parking revenue is being collected in the same way that it was done 50-60 years ago. She believes the parking program could make a better user experience, including signage. Parking assets are available that people do not know about. The revenue equipment is outdated and minimally functional. An investment will be necessary at some point.

Ms. Thomas believes an effective parking program should be people focused and financially strong, and the goal of the program should be revenue neutral. An income and expense report from 2009 to 2012 shows the program lost \$30,000 in 2011. The program finished with some revenue in 2012, largely because the City Commission allowed revenue from parking tickets to be put back into the parking program.

Ms. Thomas stated that a structural engineer with a parking garage expertise was hired last spring. Short, medium, and long range improvements to the north and south parking garages were recommended. Over the next 20 years, an estimated \$1.2 million will be needed to keep the north garage functional, and \$700,000 for the south garage.

Ms. Thomas stated that it was reported at a parking conference that new equipment can control revenue collection and revenue can increase up to 30%.

Along with the PAC, Ms. Thomas provided ideas for improving the parking program such as improved lighting, signage, and costs. Under the current contract, \$330,000 was paid last year to Standard Parking to administer the parking program. She believes approximately \$100,000 could be saved if staff was employed by the City.

Ms. Thomas believes new revenue options that could be considered include value pricing parking. Longer parking times and permits could be offered for those meters which are seldom

used. She reported that Helena sells a pass that can be hung on a rear view mirror to allow parking in certain areas.

Many of the current parking fees are set in City Code; amendments would need to come before the Commission for approval.

Ms. Thomas reported a new parking pay station has been set at the Public Library under a three month trial period. The pay station is powered by solar power, and both coins and credit cards can be used.

Along with the PAC, Ms. Thomas advocates that the charge for meter bags be looked at again. Currently the charge is \$2 per day; a more reasonable fee would be \$3.

Ms. Thomas reported there is approximately \$290,000 in outstanding parking tickets from 2007. In the past, those tickets have taken years to work through City Court because of more important issues, and many are dismissed.

The other option is to boot vehicles, and the current fee to have a boot taken off a vehicle is \$25. Ms. Thomas agrees with the PAC proposal to add an additional \$100 fine as a motivation for people to pay their parking tickets.

Ms. Thomas reported there is a current informal policy that a first parking ticket is free. She believes that an escalating rate for parking tickets would have a greater impact and discourage use of meters for long term parking.

Ms. Thomas noted that as the parking official she is not always available to provide approval to boot a vehicle. She requested that another employee be appointed to act in her absence.

Commissioner Bronson requested a summarized list of improvements identified by the consultant for the north parking garage. Ms. Thomas responded that in the near term, there is needed replacement of sealants and joints; cement calcification repairs; the sinking stair towers severed the electrical cord for the elevator and the elevator quit working; and there is concern the outside panels could drop off if they are not resealed.

Ms. Thomas reported the parking program has a \$250,000 carryover; the estimate for the short term repair work is \$415,000. She hopes the most needed repairs can be done next summer.

Mayor Winters asked Ms. Thomas her recommendation for booting vehicles.

Ms. Thomas responded she would continue the current policy after five or more parking tickets, and the City policy of seven, and adding a \$100 fine.

The consensus of the Commission was to give approval for the proposed recommendations, though they would want to review the sliding fee scale.

Ms. Thomas noted the City Manager has the authority to approve the fees for City parking lots

and garages, and she has requested a \$1 increase per month, each year for the next five years.

City Manager Greg Doyon inquired if utilization of a parking lot had improved after the last rate change. Ms. Thomas responded the rate was lowered but the lot across the street continues to be underutilized. She believes signage would help promote public parking.

Commissioner Bronson questioned if fee increases for City parking lots could be used for a maintenance fund. Ms. Thomas agreed a maintenance fund is needed.

Mr. Doyon noted the City is facing facility maintenance issues. However, the parking garages do not have any debt service.

Mr. Doyon reported the Standard Parking contract increased because of the requirement to use the Montana prevailing wage schedule.

Mr. Doyon questioned utilization trends and projections with the downtown redevelopment. Ms. Thomas responded some apartments are allowed cards for an as-you-use-it basis and some dedicated parking. There has been no impact from the newer developments.

Ms. Thomas noted the Standard Parking contract is in the second year of the three year contract. However, there is language in the contract that allows termination. She added that Standard Parking currently has seven employees.

Commissioner Burow questioned if the parking pay station meters can be used to replace street meters and the costs associated with using credit cards. Ms. Thomas responded that they could be replacements for street meters. She noted credit card fees are costly. Parking lots are the current focus for the new meters since the stay is generally longer.

Commissioner Burow expressed concern with increased costs as technology must be upgraded regularly. He questioned if City staff could perform some of the recommended repairs. He also noted that City staff costs must include benefits.

Ms. Thomas noted the City would not be required to pay prevailing wages, and benefits were included in the approximate \$100,000 cost savings if staff was employed by the City.

She provided Commissioner Burow with a copy of a City classification comparable wage chart.

Mr. Doyon thanked the members of the PAC for the thankless job they perform.

### ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the informal work session of December 4, 2012, at 6:10 p.m.