

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of September 19, 2011

Members Present: Phil Kiser, Darren Brown, Dave Campbell, Charles Fulcher

Members Absent: Charlie Bruckner

Staff Present: Wendy Thomas and Phyllis Tryon

Others Present: Joan Redeen

Call to Order: The Parking Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Mr. Kiser at 3:01 p.m. in the Rainbow Room.

Meeting Minutes Mr. Campbell made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 15, 2011 meeting as written. Mr. Fulcher seconded the motion, and all being in favor, the motion passed.

Old Business

Lighting in Parking Garages

Ms. Thomas said the power was currently out in the parking garage due to electrical work, and David Gagnon of Standard Parking was manually operating gates and could not attend this meeting. She presented a study from 2008 that discussed potential cost savings and upgraded lighting options for the parking garages. She also presented an estimate for LED lighting. Mr. Campbell inquired if the price on LED has come down, and Ms. Thomas said those estimates were given this past summer. One estimate is based on a cost of \$0.03 per kwh, which is the current rate for Parking, and the other is based on \$0.10 per kwh, which is the more standard rate in other parts of the country.

Due to the current low electricity rates for Parking, the estimates do not show a cost savings. Ms. Thomas explained that for most entities, even after labor and fixture costs are factored in for upgrades, there is an overall savings due to more energy efficient lights. She also noted that Mr. Gagnon was inquiring if LED lighting worked well in extreme cold temperatures; Mr. Campbell said he thought they did.

Mr. Brown inquired about the urgency and funding for this project. Ms. Thomas said there was no urgency, but she was researching the possibility because the parking garages don't have good lighting levels and it affects user perception of safety. Mr. Brown and Mr. Fulcher said they would prefer to wait on further discussion until Mr. Gagnon is present to provide more information. Mr. Kiser said he thought the lights had been upgraded once in the past. Ms. Thomas said her focus would be on the North Garage, since that garage has the greatest need for better lighting. Mr. Campbell noted that electric power will not get any less expensive and that upgrades are an investment in the future. It was agreed to address the topic at the next meeting.

Universal Parking Pass Survey

Ms. Thomas said the results of the survey were split between those in favor and those not in favor of a Universal Parking Pass. People were willing to pay about \$7 per month for such a pass. Mr. Kiser said he

thought those willing to only pay \$7 per month were casual shoppers and temporary downtown employees. Mr. Campbell said he thought the public misunderstood the survey and thought this proposal would replace, not supplement, the current system. After further discussion, it was agreed that the idea was not worth pursuing.

Shop/Park Pass

Ms. Thomas said the TBID turned down her request for funding support of a Shop and Park Pass. However, they suggested she approach the Great Falls Lodging Association. She will make a presentation to that group next week. The Downtown Great Falls Association and the BID are contributing \$250 each in funds, which will pay for marketing materials and printing the passes. Ms. Thomas said she received a bid for printing 3500 passes at a cost of \$675. She said she is hoping to partner with Downtown Great Falls coupon distribution program and contribute Parking passes that would allow two hours of free parking at a meter, or all day free parking in a lot or garage.

Ms. Redeen asked for clarification on the plan to bill hotels for the free parking pass usage. Ms. Thomas said she would like to operate the program for a year at no cost to the hotels, but if it is successful, she would like to bill the passes back to the hotels. The hotels will validate the pass with their name and a date. She said the members of TBID did not say yes or no to the program, but requested the trial period be at least a year. The passes will be printed on both sides on heavy colored gloss stock.

Mr. Campbell asked how the meter readers will record the passes. Ms. Thomas said they will mark tires and note the length of parking time manually. Hotels can be charged accordingly. She said the year trial will provide time to tweak the program and target which hotels are using it most. Discussion followed about ticketing over the time limit and offering a logo stamp. Ms. Redeen asked if Ms. Thomas had approached CBD. Ms. Thomas said she had, and their funding programs are more restrictive than TBID and cannot support the program. Ms. Redeen encouraged her to speak to the BID again regarding funds. Ms. Thomas said she was working to bring in hotel partners to support the program as a perk for their customers.

Meter Bags Memo

Ms. Thomas sent a memo to the City Manager regarding the policy the Parking Advisory Commission recently set on meter bags for downtown. She reiterated the policy that bags in place for construction vehicles require payment, but those in place for public safety should be free of charge.

New Business

Voided tickets

Ms. Thomas reported that in July, 1,372 tickets were written with 99 voided, which is seven percent. In August, 1,621 tickets were written with 99 voided. Discussion took place regarding how voided tickets are classified. "Officer error" is not always error on the part of the officer but may be a ticket voided as a courtesy. Ms. Thomas clarified "citation not placed on vehicle" as a situation where an attendant printed a ticket but the customer returned to the vehicle before the ticket was placed on the windshield. In those circumstances, the ticket is voided. Mr. Brown asked about the citations on police vehicles. Ms. Thomas explained that an undercover policeman had his vehicle booted because he failed to turn in his tickets to his supervisor, and Parking did not know he was an undercover policeman. A voided ticket for "City exemption" occurred when a city employee parked his own vehicle on-street for a meeting and forgot to feed the meter.

Ms. Thomas explained that if someone comes in to pay a ticket and it is their first parking citation, the policy is to void the ticket. This policy constitutes an informal "Oops" program. Mr. Kiser said he would like a courtesy ticket policy when a license plate is entered into the system on the street and there are no previous tickets. He said it could then be decided how often to allow a courtesy ticket. Mr. Campbell inquired whether the hand-held devices for the parking attendants showed previous tickets. Ms. Thomas said the devices show unpaid tickets, but she did not know what other information showed on the hand held devices. She said she thought the Parking Commission was leaning toward tracking Missoula's "Oops" program before officially introducing a program in Great Falls and that it would be useful to know how the program impacts their revenue flow.

Ms. Thomas was recently in Bozeman and parked in the parking garage there on a Saturday. The first two hours of parking are free. A retail shop owner directed them to the garage. She said there is virtually no signage for the parking garage and without the information from the shop owner, they would not have known where the garage was located. Boot fees in Bozeman are \$150 compared to \$25 in Great Falls. There are no meters, but after two hours, a parking ticket is \$25.

15-Minute Courtesy Parking

Ms. Thomas presented an example of a new 15-minute Courtesy Parking sign with the establishment name on the front of the sign. Older signs have the establishment name on the back side of the sign. She said that perhaps there could be a compromise on the cost of new signs for those business owners that are unhappy with their old signs. She said she was working with the owner of the Tap House on his signs, because they had only been up one month and he was unhappy with them. She had offered to provide new signs, and explained to him the issues with enforcement. He decided to try educating his customers further on the fact that they could legally park up to two hours. Discussion followed about having owners pay for new signs, and allowing a 30-minute Courtesy Parking sign and raising the fee to \$30.

Monthly Revenue and Expense Report

Mr. Campbell asked if the Library decided not to request free customer parking. Ms. Thomas said that since the Librarians may not be able to enforce their parking, they decided not to pursue it. Ms. Thomas said citation revenues were up a little, and that booting was being done more consistently. She explained the booting process. Discussion followed about raising boot fees and the incentive it provides publicly to pay parking tickets. Mr. Kiser recommended doubling the boot fees now, and then doubling them again next year.

Mr. Campbell inquired about the number of annual boots. Ms. Thomas said that in the past, there was a policy to not boot. Also, since she authorizes the boots, if she is out of the office, there is no one to authorize it. She said she was guessing to say there are maybe three vehicles booted per month. Once a vehicle is booted, the owner of the vehicle must pay the boot fee plus all other outstanding tickets before the boot is removed.

Mr. Campbell inquired if this is a matter that must go to the City Commission. Ms. Thomas said she would check into the approval process.

MOTION: That current boot fees be doubled to \$50.

Made by: Mr. Kiser
Seconded: Mr. Brown

There being no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Thomas explained that with clarification from the City Attorney that all past tickets are collectible, booting after the seventh ticket is more likely to occur. Before, tickets over a year old were not considered collectible, and therefore, booting could only occur on vehicles getting seven citations within one year. She stated, however, that she does not like to boot vehicles. Recently, parking garage personnel requested she boot a vehicle in the garage. The vehicle was eligible for booting, but since the owner had purchased a parking garage pass, Ms. Thomas said she opted to send the owner a letter complimenting the decision to purchase a parking pass, and requesting the owner pay the tickets so that booting does not occur.

Parking Structure RFP

Ms. Thomas said she drafted an RFP for parking garage structural analysis and sent it to the City's Risk Specialist for review. She gave her some additional language to incorporate into the RFP. She will send it to the City Attorney for review and will hopefully be able to release it within the next two weeks. She said the end product is essentially a 30-year CIP program for both garages so that improvements can be funded as needed. She said she is asking for credentials for additional work in hopes of simplifying the contracting process.

Downtown Master Plan

Ms. Thomas reported that the DMP had been presented with favorable public comment to the Planning Advisory Board. There will be a public hearing before the City Commission on October 18. If it is approved, there are strategies included on Downtown parking. In anticipation of DMP approval, Ms. Thomas has requested staff prepare an RFP, ready for release on October 20, which will address Downtown parking, wayfinding, landscaping and streetscaping, and switching one-way streets to two-way streets. She said there may be separate plans within the document, but if each element were treated separately or the elements were taken in incremental steps, there may be conflicting recommendations. She said parking and wayfinding are tied together. Funding for the RFP will come from the Parking budget, State money in the form of Transportation Planning funds, and the City Planning Department budget.

Mr. Brown stated he didn't find much information on parking in the DMP. He inquired about the Parking budget contributing to the DMP if there was little inclusion about Parking in the Plan. Ms. Thomas pointed out that Chapter 3 calls for a parking study and wayfinding study. She also explained that previous language in City Code regarding downtown parking requirements was dropped when the new Code was adopted. She stated that a parking study would address the need for amending the Code.

Public Comment

Mr. Kiser opened the meeting for public comment. He asked about parking conditions on the upper north side of the city since the PAC had suggested cutting back on patrolling in that area. Ms. Thomas said one complaint had been received from a resident about not patrolling east of 9th Street on Central Avenue. There is currently no active patrolling south of 1st Avenue South, but there is patrolling on the north side. Ms. Thomas said that most of the violations there are vehicles parking for extended time periods that do not have

residential parking permits. In addition, there have been a handful of citations for trailers being illegally parked in that area.

Mr. Kiser said that across the street from Daily Grind, he has not noticed any patrolling. He said that the south side of 1st Avenue North and around the corner still needs patrolling, but the fringe areas could be ignored.

Mr. Kiser said he had visited Astoria, Oregon, and there are no parking meters downtown. He said the downtown area had numerous small shops. He asked about angle parking on Central Avenue, and how much too narrow are the streets according to the City Public Works Department. Ms. Thomas said she thought it was about a foot and a half. Mr. Kiser said nine inches could be removed from the sidewalks on both sides of the street, and Ms. Thomas said these were issues that could be addressed in the DMP. Ms. Redeen agreed. Mr. Kiser stated that storm drainage was overlooked in the last streetscaping, and flooding has resulted all along Central Avenue.

Mr. Brown stated that he definitely wanted to see angle parking addressed in the DMP process, especially if some funding is coming from the Parking budget.

Ms. Thomas said she received two bids for snow removal and will be sending a contract to the City Commission for approval.

Mr. Brown inquired about the possibility of painting lines in parking spaces where there is a fire hydrant. Ms. Thomas said Public Works was unwilling to do so, but citizens could call Public Works and request that, or Parking could pay for it.

Ms. Thomas stated the Planning Advisory Board is seeking three new members, and the Board of Adjustment needs two new board members. She encouraged PAC members to spread the word.

Other Business

There was none.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 4:36 p.m. The next meeting of the Parking Advisory Commission will be Monday, October 17, 2011.