

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of August 15, 2011

Members Present: Darren Brown, Dave Campbell, Charlie Bruckner, Charles Fulcher

Members Absent: Phil Kiser

Staff Present: Wendy Thomas and Phyllis Tryon

Others Present: Joan Redeen and Angela James

Call to Order: The Parking Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Mr. Campbell at 3:03 p.m. in the Rainbow Room.

Meeting Minutes Mr. Brown made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 18, 2011 meeting as written. Mr. Bruckner seconded the motion, and all being in favor, the motion passed.

Old Business

Lighting in Parking Garages

Ms. Thomas stated that Mr. Gagnon has been in communication with the lighting consultant for the parking garages. She received some information just this afternoon and suggested the topic be moved to next month's meeting agenda since Mr. Gagnon could not be present for this meeting. She explained that she is researching the cost of a different lighting system for the garages. The consultant was surprised at our low electrical costs. Our supplier is NorthWestern Energy. Due to our current low costs, investing in a new, more efficient lighting system may not be cost effective. However, due to the high cost of replacing ballasts, which is approximately \$400 per unit and involves hiring private electricians, it may be worthwhile. Ms. Thomas stated it was important to have a comprehensive overview of costs. Mr. Campbell asked what the cost difference of replacing ballasts would be with a new system, and Ms. Thomas said the newer lights only burn out once every eight years or so and use much less electricity. She also noted that there are cold-tolerant bulbs on the market and she will clarify with the consultant how cold-tolerant the bulbs are that the consultant is proposing.

Mr. Campbell stated the current rows of lights are spaced quite far apart. He asked whether a new system would be spaced closer. Ms. Thomas said she didn't yet know the answer to that question, but a main factor for her is safety. She stated she would like to improve customer perception of safety as well.

Mr. Brown inquired whether a structural study of the garage with the sinking elevator issue was moving forward. Ms. Thomas said the budget for the study was approved and she was in the process of drafting an RFP, which should be out in September. Mr. Brown noted the elevator issue should be resolved before replacing any lights, as the elevator was pinching electrical cables. Mr. Campbell pointed out that even though electrical rates were low currently, they may not remain low. Ms. Thomas said the consultant was providing estimates at \$.03 per kwh, which is our current rate, and at \$.10 per kwh, which is more within the standard range.

Universal Parking Pass Survey

Ms. Thomas noted it was difficult to draw a conclusion from the Universal Parking Pass survey results. The original intention was to address frequent parking violators, but Mr. Campbell noted that many respondents misunderstood the proposed parking pass option. He asked if it changed anyone's opinion about offering a Universal Pass option. Mr. Bruckner noted many respondents were simply venting, which wasn't productive. Ms. Thomas noted that 51 percent of respondents to the survey were interested in a Universal Pass but only wanted to pay \$5 per month for that option. Discussion followed about 2-hour limits on meters.

Ms Thomas said a portion of the survey separated shoppers from business owners and employees. Of the shoppers, 43.8 percent were in favor of a Universal Pass and 42.9 percent were not. Ms. Thomas stated that if the Parking Commission was in favor of moving forward with Universal Parking Passes, there may be a total of five citizens interested in purchasing such a pass. Following discussion about the merits of a Universal Pass, Commission tabled the subject until the next meeting.

Shop/Park Pass

Ms. Thomas said she was making a presentation on the proposed Shop and Park Pass on Thursday, August 21, to the Tourism BID. The Downtown Great Falls Association is already on board, and Ms. Redeen said the BID is on board. The draft of the pass notes which hotel is offering the pass so Parking can track who is issuing the passes. Ms. Thomas suggested the hotels date stamp the pass, as is done in Helena, and the pass is only good for that day. The supporting agencies, including the Parking fund, will split printing and marketing costs. The two-hour meter limit will still apply. Ms. Thomas said if the pass program is successful, local hotels will be billed according to customer usage. She said she would test the program for a year. Ms. Redeen said the BID would commit to an annual fee to support the program. She said it might be detrimental to ask hotels to pay for the program. Ms. Thomas said she hopes to implement the pass soon.

Meter Bag Letter

Ms. Thomas said she sent Oswood Construction a letter explaining the City Attorney's policy with regard to meter bags. Essentially, the current policy is that meters would be in place and producing revenue if not for the construction. Based on the Parking Commission's recommendation that parking spaces blocked off for public safety should not have meter bag fees, she informed Oswood Construction there will be no meter bag fees along Central Avenue as of the date of the letter. She also stated in the letter that she will bring the Parking Commission recommendations before the City Manager for approval.

New Business

Library Parking Lot

Ms. Thomas said she had two requests for purchasing parking lots from the City. One was from the Great Falls Rescue Mission, which would like to purchase Lot #3 for \$1. Another was from a private residential developer, who is interested in purchasing the eastern half of Lot #4. Ms. Thomas contacted an assessor to get an idea of the value per square foot. The land values vary from \$3.87 to \$4.58 a square foot. In addition to the land value, there is a "paving contribution" figure added per square foot if

the land is to continue to be used as a parking lot. However, the developer looking at Lot #4 is interested in developing residential housing. Ms. Thomas affirmed that the land is zoned for that use. She asked for input from the Commission before pursuing either offer.

Mr. Brown said he did not support pursuing the offer from the Great Falls Rescue Mission. Mr. Bruckner asked about the revenue from Lot #4. Ms. Thomas clarified that there is substantial revenue from that lot but it comes from the west side of the lot. Discussion followed about the Rescue Mission offer on Lot #3. Ms. Thomas said the Mission is allowed free use of one quarter of that lot now, and the land value is worth much more than \$1. The Commission members agreed.

Last month, Lot #3 brought in about \$160 per month in revenue, and Lot #4 brought in over \$900. Mr. Campbell asked if maintenance costs for Lot #3 were offset by revenue. Ms. Thomas said she would have to check on the cost of snow removal. Discussion followed about lot values. Ms. Thomas said an appraisal for Lot #4 would cost approximately \$2,000. She will follow up with the developer.

The Great Falls Public Library was interested in free parking for the Library. Ms. Thomas said they get 50 percent revenue share, which was a total of \$5,139 from April 2010 through June 2011. Ms. Thomas asked them if they were willing to forego the revenue. They were unsure, and she said she pointed out to them that the City would also have to forego that revenue. Great Falls is the only city in the State that charges parking fees at the Library. With the County offices right next door, Ms. Thomas said she pointed out to the Library staff that regulation would become an issue and the Library would probably end up with less available parking if there were no fees. Mr. Brown asked if there were any free parking spots for the Library, and Ms. Thomas noted there are none. Following some discussion, it was suggested the Library try some Courtesy Parking spots.

Ms. Thomas explained the purpose behind 15 minute Courtesy Parking. Ms. Redeen said there had been discussion at a previous Commission meeting about turning Courtesy Parking signs so that the name of the sponsor is on the front side to prevent customers from using Courtesy spots to frequent a different business. Ms. Thomas stated that all the signs ordered since she has been with the City have the information on one side, so the signs in discussion must be an older version. She said she would check the new Tap House signs. The Tap House requested changing Courtesy Parking to allow parking for longer than 15 minutes, since patrons cannot come in and eat in that time frame. Ms. Thomas explained to them that since they are responsible to enforce the Courtesy Parking, they can inform their customers that they can park in those spots without incurring a ticket after 15 minutes.

Monthly Revenue and Expense Report

Ms. Thomas stated she added Citation Revenue and Year-to-date Revenue to the report. Next month, she will offer a report on the number and categories of voided citations. She said they are running an informal "Oops" ticket program right now. In July, seven percent of tickets were voided, the majority because the ticket was printed but the driver returned to the vehicle before the ticket was actually placed. The next highest volume of voided tickets was for first-time offenders. Ms. Thomas said she will bring the information back to the Commission after a couple of months of data has been collected.

Ms. Thomas stated the Parking Fund made a donation to the Urban Art Project, which helped them purchase new banners for the Parking garage. Other expenses included landscaping and sprinkler repair.

Ms. Thomas suggested a quarterly expense report instead of monthly report due to lag time between invoicing, payments, and postings to the budget. Discussion followed about what City departments provide service to Parking. Ms. Thomas stated that City crews provide pavement striping and placing handicap signs in residential areas. Mr. Brown asked whether a City crew had to remove signs or if it could be done through a private contractor. Ms. Thomas said she thought it was permissible to hire a private contractor.

Other Business

There was none.

Public Comment

Ms. Redeen introduced the new Community Ambassador for BID, Angela James. The summer ambassador, Justin Redeen, is returning to school.

Mr. Fulcher asked if better signage for the parking garages was being addressed. Ms. Thomas said that such signage is part of the Downtown Master Plan "Way Finding," along with a downtown parking study. She said before any action is taken, the City Commission needs to approve the Downtown Master Plan, which is scheduled to come before the City Commission in October.

Ms. James asked if the design of parallel/angle parking spaces downtown was still being evaluated. Ms. Thomas said she will send her the minutes of the meeting where that was addressed. Mr. Brown noted that due to current zoning, there is not enough pavement to make any changes. Ms. Redeen stated that parking changes may be addressed in the Downtown Master Plan. Ms. Thomas said there is not enough right-of-way to make any changes under current code requirements. The only solution is to allow a narrower drive lane than what has been traditionally accepted by Public Works.

Mr. Brown suggested clearly marking the pavement in front of fire hydrants downtown so that drivers do not make the mistake of pulling all the way into a space that has a hydrant, and then having to back out. Ms. Thomas said she will discuss the matter with Public Works.

Ms. Thomas is putting out an RFP for snow removal for the City parking lots. The current contract with Liggett Construction expires October 31.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 4:07 p.m. The next meeting of the Parking Advisory Commission will be Monday, September 19, 2011.