

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of July 18, 2011

Members Present: Phil Kiser, Darren Brown, Dave Campbell, Charlie Bruckner

Members Absent: Chuck Fulcher

Staff Present: Wendy Thomas and Phyllis Tryon

Others Present: Dave Gagnon and Joan Redeen

Call to Order: The Parking Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman Kiser at 3:04 p.m. in the Rainbow Room.

Meeting Minutes Mr. Campbell made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 20, 2011 meeting as written. Mr. Brown seconded the motion, and the motion passed 4-0.

Old Business

Parking Budget, FY 2012

Ms. Thomas updated the Parking Commission on the current budget process. The City Commission work session and the public hearing on the budget are tomorrow evening. Ms. Thomas invited members of the Parking Commission to attend the City Commission meeting in support of the proposed Parking budget. Mr. Kiser asked the status of parking ticket revenue in the proposed Parking budget. Ms. Thomas said the City Manager had brought the proposed revenue changes to the Parking budget to the attention of the City Commission. She explained that revenue from citations written by City Police is submitted into the General Fund, and that will not be affected by changes in the Parking budget revenues. Ticketed revenues collected through City court remain with the court. Ms. Thomas stated that the City Commission understands that parking facility improvements are needed this year and that citation revenue will help cover the costs.

Ms. Thomas noted that in the past, there had been a policy through a prior City Attorney to void uncollected parking tickets after a year because the misdemeanor offense expires after a year. However, the tickets don't expire, and current policy is to collect on tickets older than a year. The current policy is similar to that of other cities in Montana.

Courtesy Parking Program

Ms. Thomas stated that the four courtesy parking spots for Tap House Grill on Central Avenue were separated, with two spots on either end of the building frontage. The business, "Soul Mate," turned in their three courtesy spaces, and "Stranger Things" would like to have another courtesy spot.

Meter Bags/Construction Downtown

Following up on the letter from Oswood Construction and the BID, Ms. Thomas met with the City Attorney, who determined that if meters are removed because of a construction project, the contractor needs to pay a bagged meter fee.

In considering fees based on permit and building valuations, Ms. Thomas reported that the foundation permit valuation for Public Drug was \$193,280 and the building valuation is \$703,720. She said the commission had requested the information to establish an order of magnitude.

There was discussion about contractors utilizing parking spaces during a project and the unwritten policy that they request permission from neighboring business owners if they are going to park in front of an adjacent business. Mr. Kiser stated he thought the bagged meter fees were justified. He asked Ms. Thomas if she had spoken to Mr. Oswood since the letter was received, and she said she had not. However, she said Mr. Oswood was aware the Parking Commission was discussing the issue. She said as soon as the Commission had a firm recommendation, she would contact him.

Ms. Thomas said another option for bagged meter fees could be a sliding scale based on the amount of time involved for construction. Ms. Redeen said that Mr. Oswood was objecting to the fact that the City required the contractor to remove the sidewalk and also pay bagged meter fees. Ms. Thomas clarified that the City requested sections of the sidewalk be replaced, but the contractor decided to replace the entire sidewalk. She also stated that regardless of the sidewalk issue, the contractor needed that area for staging and would have had to bag or remove meters anyway.

Ms. Redeen stated the BID had acted on information from Mr. Oswood's letter alone, without knowledge of the information just noted.

Ms. Thomas said she could write to Mr. Oswood conveying the City Attorney's determination that, except for the construction project in progress, there would be meters generating revenue in that location, hence the bagged meter fees. The Parking Advisory Commission could still consider making recommendations in the future for adjusting rates based on construction time frames or based on a threshold for new construction downtown.

Mr. Kiser commented on the conflict between encouraging business downtown and charging parking fees. He stated he would qualify the issue by having contractors pay for the spaces they are using for construction vehicles and operations but not for spaces taken out under direction of the City for barriers for public safety. It was noted the City would be receiving building permit revenues anyway, but Ms. Thomas noted that Parking revenues is not the same as building revenues.

MOTION: The Parking Advisory Commission recommends that contractors pay bagged meter fees for parking spaces utilized for construction staging, but not for spaces blocked off due to public safety requirements.

Made by: Mr. Kiser
Seconded: Mr. Brown

Vote: All being in favor, the motion passed.

Ms. Thomas stated she would bring the recommendation forward to the City Manager. The recommendation does not require an amendment to City Code, as it is simply a policy recommendation. However, it could affect Oswood Construction on their current project.

Safety in Parking Structures/Lighting

Ms. Thomas brought to the attention of the Commission the fact that there had been some incidents in the North Parking Garage. Mr. Gagnon said his mother had gone to work at 4:30 a.m. and was followed into the parking garage by a carload of drunken individuals. Her car was bumped and the individuals were about to cause a confrontation, but other workers coming into the garage to park prevented any further incident. Mr. Kiser asked if this was an isolated incident or a common occurrence. Mr. Gagnon stated that although this incident was unusual, there is a lot of unwanted activity in the structure after hours. He said that after the parking garage office is closed, people are sometimes drinking on the rooftop, skate boarding in the garage, and painting graffiti.

Ms. Thomas said the police informed her they could not provide enforcement without the garages being correctly posted. The garages are now posted, and the police have access to the garages and are stepping up their patrolling. Ms. Thomas said they are informed of the shift changes at NEW, so they can be a presence during those times. She said a lighting consultant is preparing a cost estimate for more energy efficient lighting in the parking garages with higher lumens to increase the sense of exposure.

Ms. Redeen commented that there could be unreported incidents. Mr. Gagnon stated that is a concern and that supervisors at NEW were walking employees to their cars. Discussion followed about the perception of safety versus actual safety issues. Ms. Thomas said she and Mr. Gagnon have researched reflective paint as well as lighting.

Universal Pass Survey

The Parking Pass Survey continues through Friday, July 22. The week following, Ms. Thomas will tabulate the numbers. As of this morning, 189 people had taken the survey. Mr. Campbell said his neighbor came by with a flyer stating the universal pass prices were outrageous. Mr. Campbell said he thought people may not understand the concept, but it was definitely a bargain to a certain group.

Mr. Kiser pointed out that the Great Falls Tribune stated it was the Parking Advisory Commission that came up with the idea of a universal parking pass, when in fact it was the Planning and Community Development Director, Mr. Haynes. Discussion followed about the small sector of those parking downtown who violate meter parking on a daily basis and ignore the two-hour limit on meters. One goal is to have people who work downtown park in off-street parking instead of using meters, which are designed for customer parking.

Ms. Redeen brought up the "Oops" ticket program and said the Business Improvement District board was in favor. Ms. Thomas said she would create a report to show voided parking violations by category, such as: how many people with a Handicap parking pass get a ticket (which is later voided) because they failed to display the pass; how many first-time tickets are voided; and how many tickets are voided

because the driver of a vehicle appears just as the ticket is being written. The report will show the number of voided tickets, the category for each ticket, and the amount of revenue written off.

There was some question whether parking enforcement had the technology to work with an “Oops” ticket program. Tickets would be forgiven once annually. Missoula will have a trial program beginning in January. Ms. Thomas contacted Anne Guest in Missoula, who will give her updates on how the program is working.

Monthly Revenue and Expense Reports

Ms. Thomas added annual comparisons to the monthly revenue report. Mr. Kiser noted that expense reports were included in the past, and Ms. Thomas said she could add that information in the future.

Other Business

Ms. Thomas contacted the Tourism Board (TBID) to request they support a program in which local hotels could offer a one-day downtown parking pass for visitors. She suggested the TBID pay \$.50 on the dollar for passes. Although they were supportive of the idea, they are not sure the program fits with their mission, which is to put “heads in beds.” Ms. Redeen suggested approaching the CVB. Ms. Thomas had also brought up a “Park ‘n Fly” program. It’s much less expensive to park in a downtown parking garage than at the airport, and it’s also protected from weather. Hotels in various parts of the country offer Park n Fly parking and shuttle guests to airports for free. Ms. Thomas said she was unsure of the benefit to downtown Great Falls. Ms. Redeen suggested that if downtown hotels don’t already offer their parking facilities to air travelers, it might be worth a conversation. Ms. Thomas also stated that hotels could offer returning travelers a downtown parking pass to go shopping before they head home. Ms. Thomas was will make a presentation to TBID.

Mr. Kiser asked Ms. Redeen if both the Downtown Association and BID were supportive of the “Oops” ticket idea. Ms. Redeen stated the BID is supportive, but she didn’t know about the Downtown Association. She added that the BID is also very supportive of escalating fines for repeat parking violations.

Public Comment

Mr. Kiser opened public comment. Ms. Redeen said she might not be able to attend meetings once the school session begins, but Gary Hackett is new to the BID board and may attend.

Mr. Kiser said he would like to shrink the parking patrol district further.

The next Parking Advisory Commission meeting will be Monday, August 15, 2011 at 3:00 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 4:15 p.m.