

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes of the June 19, 2025 Meeting

Chair Inge Buchholz called the Parking Advisory Commission meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. in the Planning and Community Development Conference Room at the Civic Center.

Members Present: Inge Buchholz, Chair,
Jayson Olthoff, Vice Chair via Zoom
Carol Berg
Nathan Laidlaw

Members Absent: Katie Hanning
Kellie Pierce

Staff Present: Brock Cherry, Director
Lonnie Hill, Deputy Director
Andrew Finch, Sr. Transportation Planner
Alaina Mattimiro, Associate Planner
Rob Moccasin, Neighborhood Council Liaison
Jamie Nygard, Sr. Administrative Assistant

Others Present: Jenn Rowell, with the Electric

Meeting Minutes: Ms. Buchholz asked if there were any comments or corrections to the April 17, 2025 Parking Advisory Commission meeting minutes. Seeing none, Mr. Laidlaw motioned to approve the minutes, and Ms. Berg seconded.

Vote: All in favor, the motion passed 4-0

New Business

Parking Budget Update

- I. Proposed Budget and Staff Recommendations**
 - **Request &150,000.00 from the Downtown TIF**
 - **Increase Parking Fines**

The Parking Advisory Commission discussed the dwindling parking budget and explored potential solutions. Mr. Cherry proposed that the Commission recommend requesting \$150,000 from the downtown TIF to support operations and to increase parking fines. He stated that the depletion would make the Parking Program a relevant topic and bring it to the forefront for the current City Commission. The Commission agreed that raising fines alone will not resolve the parking issues, but may improve compliance and revenue. There was also discussion regarding the courtesy tickets that are issued and the costs incurred by the city in issuing them. They decided to recommend the \$150,000 request and support increasing fines in principle, with staff to provide specific figures later. The Commission further discussed the possibility of exploring other strategies, such as adjusting the booting policy and potentially bringing parking operations in-house.

MOTION: To recommend to the City Commission that Staff request to receive \$150,000.00 from the Downtown TIF to support operations and increase parking fines.

Made by: Mr. Laidlaw

Second by: Ms. Buchholz

VOTE: 3-1 with Mr. Olthoff voting against

II. Visioning Exercise – “The Ideal Parking Program”

1. Vision and Purpose

- **What should a City-run parking program accomplish?**
- **Is it primarily about access, revenue, turnover, or support for downtown businesses?**

The Commission discussed the ideal parking program for Great Falls. Although she was absent, Ms. Pierce provided input via email that Mr. Hill read, suggesting a city-run program that incorporates a mix of on-street parking, garages, and service lots. The program should encourage turnover, offer accessible and affordable options, and ensure sustainability. The Commission considered the program's goals, which include attracting customers downtown, promoting turnover, and balancing the needs of both businesses and visitors. They recognized that while free parking is ideal for users, it may not be feasible. The Commission also acknowledged the recent parking tutorials released to the public and expressed their appreciation for them. Mr. Cherry noted that funds have been set aside for parking garage maintenance for years, but staff capacity has not been sufficient to utilize these funds. The Commission discussed the membership concept and inquired about data that could be collected to identify problem areas. Ms. Buchholz also asked about the possibility of enforcement being conducted on the weekends, as residents use spaces for the entire weekend and don't move their vehicles.

2. User Experience

- **How would you rate parking downtown as a visitor?**
- **What updates would make it feel more modern, fair, or user-friendly?**

The Commission discussed issues related to parking kiosks, including user non-completion of transactions and problems with credit card compatibility. Mr. Olthoff suggested using educational videos to assist users and acknowledged that some issues will always persist. The Commission agrees on the importance of consistent messaging and education to enhance the parking system. They explored potential improvements, including adding more kiosks per block to increase accessibility.

3. City Role and Priorities

- **Should the City continue operating garages and surface lots or shift toward partnerships?**

- **Are there lots that could be repurposed to better support housing, business, or public space goals?**

The Commission agreed that the program needs to continue. Mr. Cherry stated that the City may be considering a partnership with the Business Improvement District.

4. Performance and Sustainability

The Commission discussed strategies to enhance parking enforcement and educating the public in the downtown area. They suggested focusing on informing business owners and the public about common violations, highlighting the importance of gaining support from businesses. The group debated the effectiveness of courtesy tickets, with some arguing they provide a learning opportunity for first-time offenders, while others pointed out the administrative costs. They also considered increasing fines and creating more informative pamphlets to accompany tickets. The discussion highlights the need to modify parking behavior and address the program's financial challenges, as the current approach does not generate sufficient revenue to cover expenses. Staff aims to define metrics for success and utilize data to guide decisions for an improved parking program in the future.

5. Imagine its five years from now, and Great Falls has a downtown parking program we're proud of.

Education, database information, and the ability to utilize that information to drive decisions are key to success. Mr. Moccasin stated that business owners have an obligation to educate their customers and that everyone needs to support the group's decisions.

There was some discussion about the courtesy tickets and whether it was worth issuing them. Mr. Laidlaw reiterated that an instructional pamphlet should be issued with the courtesy tickets.

Mr. Cherry expressed appreciation for the conversation and input from business owners regarding parking issues. The group discussed the history of parking fees in the downtown area, noting that people initially resisted increases but eventually adapted. Mr. Olthoff raised two concerns: a discrepancy in the information about handicapped parking on the website and a question about the location of the South garage. Staff promised to investigate the handicapped parking information and clarify it by the end of the next day.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:51 P.M.