

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of May 21, 2012

Members Present: Phil Kiser, Darren Brown, Dave Campbell

Members Absent: Chuck Fulcher

Staff Present: Wendy Thomas, Phyllis Tryon

Others Present: Joan Redeen

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

Meeting Minutes: Mr. Kiser asked if there were any changes to the April 23, 2012 meeting minutes. Mr. Campbell made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Brown seconded. All being in favor, the motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Kiser inquired about changes mentioned at the last meeting to the block on which the Glacier State building is located. Ms. Thomas said the Arvon building is in the process of being sold. The owner is applying for the Technical Assistance Program for a feasibility study and floor plans for an adaptive reuse. They can then apply for Historic Preservation Tax Credits. She said it is hoped the feasibility study would be completed by the end of July.

Capital Needs Assessment Update

Ms. Thomas stated that the Capital Needs Assessment results were received. She used estimated cost figures in preparing the proposed Parking budget for Fiscal Year 2012-2013. She stated that there are not enough funds to complete all the suggested repairs. Budgeted repairs for the coming fiscal year for the South Garage include repair where doors are scraping and costs for pigeon control. Mr. Brown asked about water pooling by the elevator door, and Ms. Thomas said that was also included in upcoming repair projects. Mr. Campbell said sealing against water damage, particularly on the top levels, was a priority. Ms. Thomas noted that the South Garage was sealed in 2007. Ms. Thomas said control equipment in the North Parking Garage has been operational for 30 years and the average lifespan of such equipment is typically 7 to 10 years.

Mr. Brown asked about funding for lighting. Ms. Redeen suggested that Ms. Thomas contact Carol Bronson, who is currently working on a grant for safety items with a deadline of June 6. She thought lighting may qualify as a safety issue. Ms. Thomas said that consultants have stated it is not cost effective to replace lighting fixtures due to the long-term payback period. She said that simply cleaning the lenses could improve the lighting in the North Parking Garage, since they have never been cleaned. Mr. Kiser suggested also targeting key areas of the parking garage for upgraded lighting. Mr. Brown suggested using brighter bulbs when replacing them.

Ms. Thomas said she included sealant for panels in the North Parking Garage in the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2012-13, as well as having work done on the stair towers. Mr. Brown suggested having storm drains cleaned, and Ms. Thomas said that is work that Standard Parking could perform. Ms. Thomas said a lot of the light fixtures in the South Garage are new, but the North Garage fixtures could be checked for cleaning.

NEW BUSINESS

Parking Annual Budget

Ms. Thomas said she has budgeted funds for travel this coming fiscal year for the Pacific Northwest Parking Conference July 15-17. She is hoping to secure a scholarship for officials new to parking programs for the conference.

Ms. Thomas noted maintenance costs for the Parking program have gone up. She included money in the budget for Fiscal Year 2012-13 for a review of Parking Lot #4. There was discussion about available reserve Parking funds to cover the costs of budgeted repairs. Ms. Thomas noted that she can request budget authority for items budgeted this fiscal year but not spent.

Mr. Brown inquired if Carl Walker is being contracted to perform the improvements outlined in the Capital Needs Assessment. Ms. Thomas said the assessment contract with Walker allowed her to draw up construction documents, but that she also would need to put the work for the North Parking Garage out for bid. Mr. Brown asked when repairs might begin, and Ms. Thomas said she would make it a focus in late June to look at that.

Monthly Revenue & Expense Reports (4/12)

Ms. Thomas stated she would speak with Mr. Gagnon of Standard Parking about procedures for collecting and depositing revenues, and any audit procedures. She stated that she has been requested by the City Manager to research alternative methods from Standard Parking to administer the parking program, such as City administration. She has spoken with the parking administrator in Missoula and also someone from an engineering firm, and they were surprised at the amount of fees charged by Standard Parking. Ms. Thomas has requested Missoula's parking budget to review, since it is a comparable program to Great Falls. She said when the initial analysis was done at the time the contract with Standard Parking came up for renewal, the costs for the City to administer the parking program were very close to the amount charged by Standard Parking. She said that there may be cost savings by looking at part-time versus full-time employees. The current contract expires December 2013. Mr. Kiser said it will be interesting to see if the Missoula parking program includes snow removal, sweeping and other duties.

BOARD DISCUSSION

Ms. Redeen invited members of the Commission to suggest a speaker and topics, or volunteer to be a speaker, on parking for the Montana Downtown Conference which will take place in Great Falls October 24-26. Ms. Thomas said she might find a speaker from the July conference in Seattle. She also said Boise, Idaho has recently completed parking and transportation studies in line with Great Falls' interests. Ms. Redeen said there was no funding for an honorarium for a speaker, but lodging costs and possibly travel could be covered.

Mr. Kiser asked Ms. Redeen if she had any information on the Arvon building. She said that based on the information received from the feasibility study, there has been an offer received on the property. She will pass on any new information as she receives it.

Mr. Kiser noted that the Complete Streets Open House was being held at Benefis on Wednesday. He also stated said he had received a call about the sale of the parking lot next to the Great Falls Rescue Mission. Ms. Thomas said she would share the appraisal information when she receives it. She said that at some time in the past, that location was a service station and she will be visiting with the City Attorney about any City liability for cleanup on the site. Mr. Kiser said there is a State fund for such clean up and he did not think the City has any liability.

Ms. Thomas said she had talked to the parking official in Rome, Georgia and there was no new information to report. They have not made any decisions on changes to their parking program. Ms. Thomas also reported that Mr. Gagnon gave her a list of about five Downtown business owners who are complaining about the lack of availability of parking tokens for purchase. Mr. Kiser noted that a business owner could pass out quarters in lieu of tokens.

Ms. Thomas noted that public outreach is lacking for the parking program. She then shared information on the responses to the Request for Proposals for the Downtown Access, Circulation and Streetscape Study.

Ms. Thomas encouraged members of the Parking Advisory Commission (PAC) to tell others about the open seat on the PAC. Mr. Kiser said he had recently been in Whitefish and the city was very busy and consists of blocks of one-story buildings. He said we need to find someone who has addressed parking in a city like Great Falls with some blocks of one-story buildings and then 5 to 7-story buildings. He also noted that Great Falls does not do a good job of selling itself. He said that Kalispell cannot compare to Downtown Great Falls, but public perception is the opposite. Ms. Redeen noted that our community residents do not promote Great Falls. Mr. Kiser said we need to slow down traffic in the Downtown area, and adding angle parking to both sides of Central Avenue would help. Ms. Thomas said she would share an article on parking with the PAC that was in the American Planning Association magazine. She said there are a number of cities without time limits at meters, but meter prices vary depending upon demand. She also shared that the Missoula parking official suggested 10-hour meters on 2nd Avenue South, where there is little revenue.

There was further discussion on how to make the parking program more efficient and how to better market the program. Mr. Brown stated that even if there is a change in program administration, it is always possible to go back to a contract situation should that be proven to be more cost effective. There was discussion about parking fees in other cities and the perceived value of that parking, and possible rate changes for parking at lots and meters in Great Falls, depending on demand.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting is regularly scheduled for Monday, June 18, 2012. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:13 p.m.