

GREAT FALLS PARKING ADVISORY COMMISSION
Minutes of August 21, 2012

Members Present: Phil Kiser, Darren Brown, Chuck Fulcher

Members Absent: Dave Campbell

Staff Present: Wendy Thomas

Others Present: Dave Gagnon, Joan Redeen, Roamy Valero (Standard Parking), Brian Scoggins (Standard Parking)

Call to Order: The Parking Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Mr. Kiser at 3:00 p.m. in the Rainbow Room of the Civic Center.

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

OLD BUSINESS

Shop Till You Drop Permits

The Parking Advisory Commission reviewed the report on the Shop Till You Drop parking program. Mr. Kiser asked why some permits were issued without expiration dates, and Ms. Thomas said she will ask hotel personnel, since all permits should be issued with an expiration date. Ms. Redeen inquired about the permit given to a hotel employee, and noted also that there are a number of local County license plates which were issued permits. Mr. Brown noted the number of repeat permit customers which are also local license plates. Mr. Gagnon said these could be visitors that are borrowing local vehicles. Ms. Redeen noted a location in which passes were out on the counter and not secured. Ms. Thomas stated she did not think the program is a success, and there was consensus among PAC members. Mr. Fulcher pointed out that the Comfort Inn seemed to have the most out of town permits issued, and Mr. Gagnon stated that there were a number of Canadian visitors using the program. Ms. Thomas noted that the Comfort Inn at the Marketplace provides permits with a visitor's packet and are actively participating in the permit program.

NEW BUSINESS

Monthly Revenue & Expense Reports (7/12)

Ms. Thomas stated that there were excess budgeted funds left at the end of last fiscal year due to funds set aside for infrastructure improvements to the North Parking Garage that were not made. She explained that since the budget for this fiscal year includes funds for those improvements, it was not necessary to request a carry-over from last fiscal year. Since the company Carl Walker has not responded to Ms. Thomas, she will be checking with the City Attorney as to whether she can contact the next bidder on the list of responders, as opposed to starting the whole process over again.

Mr. Fulcher asked if there were funds budgeted for this fiscal years for signage. Ms. Thomas explained that \$1,700 is included in the budget for minor signage repairs and maintenance. She said, however, that the Downtown Access and Circulation Plan includes a wayfinding portion. She said that process is anticipated to take about nine months, so that by next spring there should be information available. The entire study will cost about \$120,000

and the Parking Fund is contributing \$20,000. Ms. Redeen said they will be applying again for an Our Town Grant and for other grants to assist in wayfinding and parking signage.

Standard Parking Guest Presentations

Roamy Valero of Standard Parking explained that Standard Parking has focused on hiring a division of former municipal parking officials to work with municipalities as parking consultants. These consultants help city parking officials evaluate revenue and expenses and develop parking programs. He explained that Standard Parking is introducing a paradigm shift in public relations with parking enforcement officers, shifting from a focus on violators to an ambassador role with customers. He said Standard Parking is tying this shift to branding, including uniforms.

Mr. Valero said the Federal government has spent funds on “curb management” pilot programs in San Francisco and Seattle to look at parking pricing and management of curb space. He said curb space management is about municipalities managing the public right-of-way. The Federal government is working to identify how transportation, parking demand, economic development, and residential components evolve in a central business district (CBD). He said they anticipate Federal dollars becoming available to cities to upgrade parking technologies. The current focal point in the industry is the addition of payment options from just coin payment to dollar bills, credit cards, pay phone and mobile applications. Mr. Valero said they have seen an increase in compliance and in some cases a decrease in citations with the introduction of new payment methods. The loss of citation revenues can be seen as a negative, but the focus becomes compliance and management of desirable curb space.

Mr. Valero explained that the trend in small cities is to remove all parking requirements in the CBD and to develop Defined Benefit Districts (DBD) in which a portion of parking revenues are being reinvested into the district through projects such as flower beds, holiday decorations, and streetscapes. He said municipalities are working to attract reinvestment in CBDs by approaching developers with available parking space inventory. Citation revenues are a significant source of funds, and Mr. Valero said that some small cities have an aggressive boot program, vehicles cannot be licensed with outstanding tickets, and unpaid tickets are pursued for payment. Citation fees have typically gone up from \$10-\$15 per ticket to \$20-\$25. Mr. Valero noted that compliance with parking fees is important and that for every additional parking space payment option, revenues increase 10-15%. People are more compliant if they have options for paying for parking. For instance, if someone is out of coin and the only option is coin payment, they will take a chance on getting a ticket. However, that same customer will pay with a credit card if it is an option. He explained that a typical capture rate (catching violations and writing a citation) on violations is 30%.

Mr. Valero said that typically meters have a lifespan of 5 years, and the new kiosks have a lifespan of 7 years. He did note that he worked on meters such as exist in Great Falls in 1989. He stated that electronic meters which accept coin and credit card tend to get about 10-12% credit card use because customers will still use coin. He said honor boxes at parking lots in Great Falls need upgrading, and that Great Falls has one of the last open systems for meter collection, which is not a good system. He also said he did not think it worthwhile to have a parking attendant on duty on Saturday. Mr. Valero noted that free parking does not equate to economic development, and that business employees will park in customer spaces unless there is a program to manage parking.

Mr. Valero said he was looking to introduce “a win” upgrade in Great Falls on a small scale to test the market. The library parking lot might be a place to test an upgrade. Discussion followed about a test upgrade somewhere in the CBD of Great Falls. It was noted that a goal for compliance rates is 80%, and Great Falls is consistently at 60-70%.

Ms. Thomas stated that at the PIPTA conference in Seattle, she was told repeatedly that Great Falls does not charge enough for credit card meter/kiosk parking payment machines. Mr. Valero explained that service must be upgraded and modernized in order to increase fees, and that it is time to invest in service equipment. In particular, he said the parking lots in Great Falls need to be addressed. He noted that new technology requires maintenance. Mr. Brown asked about the lifespan on new technology, and Mr. Valero explained that the environment (weather) is a factor. He emphasized that a portion of revenue needs to be reinvested in maintaining structures and new parking equipment.

Mr. Kiser raised a concern about small communities where customers want to park directly in front of a business and may not be willing to walk a block to use a parking kiosk. Mr. Valero said he suggests electronic meters with credit card capability for Great Falls. He said that branding is part of introducing new technology. Ms. Thomas said she personally would like kiosks because she is constantly parking and then getting back in her car to move it to make sure she is in compliance with meter pole locations. Mr. Valero discussed a program approach of encouraging compliance rather than focusing on citations.

Mr. Brown asked if Standard Parking is requesting a multi-year contract. Mr. Valero stated that payment for new machines is an amendment to the contract. If the City does not renew the contract, the City then assumes responsibility for payments on the new technology.

Mr. Fulcher said he would like to see a proposal. Mr. Valero said he would be excited to be part of a parking program update for Great Falls. Mr. Kiser noted that revenues have dropped for the Parking program over the years, but the program has not changed. He said he has appreciated the fresh ideas that Ms. Thomas has brought forward.

Mr. Kiser asked about legal requirements on street space to allow angle parking on both sides of downtown streets. Mr. Valero said that the most stringent requirement between both State and Federal laws is the requirement that prevails. He said that planners today desire a more pedestrian feel to downtown streets and wider sidewalks, but State and Federal mandates prevail. Ms. Thomas stated that this is one of the items being addressed in the Downtown Access and Circulation Study.

Ms. Thomas inquired about the training Standard Parking held with employees and about follow up. Mr. Valero said follow up is in 30 days, and the training went well. He said there will be webinars available to keep employees engaged and up to date on industry trends. Uniforms will be updated also. Ms. Thomas noted that leadership is about making change a reality, and that the parking ambassadors on the street make or break the program. She wants to ensure that customer feedback is positive instead of negative. Mr. Gagnon said the training addressed that issue, and he will follow up. Mr. Valero stated that the skill set for employees has changed in terms of public relations over the years. He stressed the need for employees to have good customer communication and that writing citations is only one of their roles.

Ms. Thomas asked if she could expect a proposal on an upgrade to a test area, such as the library parking lot. Mr. Valero said they could introduce a test at little to no cost to the City.

There was no further new business.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Kiser asked about the Growth Policy Community Open House meeting held in August. Ms. Thomas said there were 80 people in attendance, and the meeting was participatory with the public, who seemed to appreciate the opportunity for involvement. She said there are four different working groups, and there are three one-hour meetings for each group to help develop goals, objectives and strategies for the City for the next 15 years. She encouraged PAC members to get involved. She said she will be going out to schools in the district and ask students to participate in the same type of exercises as were conducted at the Open House.

Mr. Kiser reported he had visited Astoria and there were no parking meters, but people were out shopping at the new mall area. Ms. Redeen reported that an individual is conducting studies which show significantly more tax dollars are garnered from downtown areas rather than shopping centers such as Walmarts, malls, etc. She said this individual will speak at the Downtown Conference. She said the conclusion is that cities should invest more in revitalizing downtown areas rather than urban sprawl. Ms. Redeen also pointed out that typically, the largest portion of a business tax bill goes to county government, not city government. Counties typically receive about 80% of tax revenues.

Ms. Thomas reported she had visited Moscow, Idaho, and she said it has an old downtown of single or two-story buildings, every store had a "shop local" poster in the window, and there was free parking with a three-hour limit. She said there was a high use of sidewalk cafes. Mr. Fulcher said he was asked if a business can purchase parking space in front of their store and use the space for an eating area. Mr. Valero asked if Great Falls participated in the National Day of Park Space, where cities place Astroturf in street parking spaces and businesses place seating in the areas to create "park space." Great Falls has not participated.

Ms. Redeen said a suggestion at a Business Improvement District meeting was to sell some parking spaces in a lot to property owners who need parking, but not allow the property owners to resell them except to the City. Ms. Thomas said she has talked about long-term leases, so that the City holds title to the property and could use the funds from leases for parking improvements. Ms. Redeen also said it has been suggested that a permanent stage be installed for Alive@5.

ADJOURNMENT

The next regularly scheduled meeting is on Monday, September 17, 2012. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.