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NEWS LOCAL

Downtown parking may not remain free

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star
Tuesday, February 7, 2017 3:09:58 EST PM



Math behind why some Vancouver parking meters are so pricey explained by city

A move towards a full user-pay downtown parking lot system is raising some concern with the Downtown Association.

In November 2015, city council passed a resolution calling a review of the free municipal public parking lots in the downtown.

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker said the lots are expensive to maintain and the city is ultimately losing money on what could be a revenue-neutral lot.

But the Downtown Association says it can't lose the free parking for its members and downtown businesses, shops and services.

"That would just be creating an added barrier. We're trying to draw more residents and tourists to the downtown area and paying for parking is just another obstacle," said Josh Ingram, manager of the Downtown Association.

Ingram said he's received a lot of comments from his members, who say the free parking is an incentive for their downtown customers.

"People can shop up on Great Northern Road and they don't pay for parking. Why should they be penalized and have to pay for parking when we're trying to create a vibrant downtown," Ingram said.

However Shoemaker says that costs for maintaining the facility include asphalt, lighting costs, replacing guard rails and snowplowing, among other things and currently there is no place to generate revenue to maintain the lots.

While the lots currently have a two hour free time limit, violators can receive a \$10 parking ticket. Shoemaker says that by charging about \$1.25 per hour, patrons can stay in the downtown area as long as they want and the cost isn't outrageous.

Since 2005 the city has provided two-hour free downtown parking at a cost of \$190,000 annually.

Years earlier, the Downtown Association covered any shortfall of costs the city incurred to maintain the downtown lots but that was eliminated around 2001, Shoemaker said.

A pay-as-you-go system, similar to those found on Queen Street, have a one-time cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000 and would pay for themselves quickly, Shoemaker said.

"The statistics show that for one lot, users would pay for the pay-as-you-go machine for all the lots. I think this just makes sense. We should be drawing on our city resources for free downtown parking," he said.


Shoemaker said the paid parking lots would only be operational eight hours a day, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. with free parking maintained on nights, weekends and holidays.

The costs to maintain the downtown parking lots currently range from \$190,000 to \$260,000 per year.


The public is invited to an open house Wednesday to provide ideas and suggestions to the plan between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. and again from p.m. to 8 p.m. The open house will be held in the Civic Centre's Thompson Room (level 3).

The suggestions will be reviewed by the committee and a final report and recommendation will be presented to council in April.

Last year, city council approved the installation of LED lighting in the municipal parking lots.



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