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Municipal parking lot rules to change

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star
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City council supported a plan that will see municipal parking lots remain 'free' for two-hours and charge users for additional parking but are little more hesitant to charge municipal employees for parking.

Two separate parking lot items were debated by council Monday night.

Council decided to keep municipal parking lots free of charge for the first two hours of use.

After that user fees will kick in – up to a \$5 maximum daily limit – for use of the 10 lots in the downtown area.

Don Scott, manager of transit and marking, said it became clear through stakeholder meetings that the first two 'free' hours of parking is a way the municipality can support the downtown.

And as an additional support, the stakeholders were looking for options that would allow residents and visitors to stay downtown even long without moving their vehicles.

That assistance will come in the way of advancing the concept of leasing to own 13 pay and display machines where vehicle operators can purchase additional parking time.

The city will also look at implementing a mobile payment solution where customers can pay for municipal parking through their mobile phone, tablet or computer while 'off site.' This is particularly important for situations where a dinner or appointment may run late or over the two-hour free limit, Scott told city council.

The system would help the city achieve its maximum revenues and provide better service for the end user.

Daily and monthly passes that already exist for downtown workers will also remain in place, he said.

The approved plan will also see a reconfiguration to the parking layout at the Bingham lot to improve traffic flow for motorists and pedestrians and repurpose the north-east corner of the Brock and Albert parking lot to include a 4,250 square-foot multi-use court for the community.

The parking committee will reconvene annually to explore the option of testing a pilot project that would see gates used to control entry and access to an existing municipal lot and review the enhancements to parking enforcement.

In total, the city maintains 974 parking spaces in 10 municipal lots, in addition to the 346 metered on street parking spaces in the downtown core.

A second motion, moved by Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker asks city staff to develop a report on how it will charge municipal employees for parking at all city-owned buildings, including the Civic Centre.

Shoemaker was originally seeking full proposal for a fee structure on how the process would work, arguing that it would put staff in an uncomfortable situation to determine whether or not city employees should be charged to park at their place of employment. Shoemaker said that for consistency, all city employees should be charged for parking at all city buildings – whether it be city hall, a community centre or a library.

He said recent trends suggest that more and more employees are paying to park their vehicles in the workplace, even public service buildings like the courthouse and hospital, for example.

"It's a tool we are not using," he said.

While he doesn't expect the city to generate revenue from the move, he said it would help lessen maintenance costs of the lots. The lots are currently maintained through the city's operational budget.

But Ward 2 Coun. Susan Myers countered that while on the surface the idea looks easy to implement, it would be very difficult to police.

In addition, she noted that places like Sault Area Hospital, Algoma University and Sault College charge everyone to park at their buildings, not just employees.

She also argued that taxpayers already pay for the parking lots through their tax dollars, and that includes city employees who are taxpayers, she said.

Myers used her constituent email list to quiz her contacts about the idea.

Of the 57 responses she received Monday prior to the council meeting, 47 responded that no one should pay for parking. Eight others took the opposite view that all motorists should pay while nine believe that only city staff should pay parking fees.

Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian said he believes it's council's responsibility to learn and understand the issues which will be presented in the report and determine what should be done from there.

He questioned whether the issues will pose labour relations issues with collective agreements that are in place with many city employees.

Asking for the report on how council could implement a charge to municipal employees for parking at city owned buildings was passed in a 8-4 recorded vote.

Those in favour of seeking the report included Mayor Christian Provenzano and councillors Christian and Steve Butland (Ward 1), Shoemaker and Judy Hupponen (Ward 3), Rick Niro (Ward 4), and Frank Fata and Marchy Bruni (Ward 5).


Those against the resolution included Myers and wardmate Sandra Hollingsworth, Ward 4 Coun. Lou Turco and Ward 6 Coun. Joe Krmpotich.

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