

Year round free parking could have benefits

By **Dan Gray** - January 12, 2022 @ 11:20 am



Councillors on Monday night voted unanimously for free downtown parking, throughout the new round of pandemic restrictions.

With a yearly revenue projected at just over \$330,000 the almost 3 week cancellation of fees will cost taxpayers approximately \$19,000 in lost revenue.



When you look at the overall parking budget in the city, it is projected to add over \$210,000 to the levy already.

Councillor Shoemaker, who brought the motion forward gave this as part of his reasoning.

"I'm not saying this will cure what is currently ailing. Our small businesses in town are suffering under the strain of another lockdown, which I understand [are for] medical reasons but no doubt has a hard impact on their ability to draw in business drawing customers," said Shoemaker. "This is just one hopefully minor way in which we can, you know, lend a hand to our businesses who are struggling."

Do you feel that free parking in the downtown core will benefit businesses, many whose operation is significantly restricted or closed?

Yes; any measures will help out

609 votes

✓ Not at all

407 votes

Undecided

45 votes

Total Votes: 1121
January 8, 2022 @ 2:06 pm
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Our poll which we ran over the weekend suggests 60 percent of over 1100 people who voted agree that this action will help.

In light of the admission of struggling businesses and as some have said, not just due to COVID, could free parking in the city actually save taxpayers money and remove one of the hurdles to shopping and coming downtown?

Council is on record as wanting to invest in ways to make the core better, and to this end, moving the bus terminal and building a plaza are two of those multi-million dollar endeavours. Removing paid parking, could actually end up saving money in the end.

The photo to the left is the city's parking budget.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES - PARKING					
	2021	2022	\$	%	
	BUDGET	BUDGET	Change	Change	
			2021 to 2022	2021 to 2022	
REVENUE					
Fees and user charges	331,729	331,727	28	0.01%	
	331,729	331,727	28	0.01%	
EXPENDITURES					
Salaries	68,256	69,150	894	1.31%	
Benefits	15,731	15,910	179	1.14%	
	83,987	85,060	1,073	1.28%	
Utilities and Fuel	6,294	6,294	0	0.00%	
Materials and supplies	19,900	18,900	(1,000)	-5.03%	
Maintenance and repairs	114,150	115,150	1,000	0.88%	
Taxes and licenses	37,545	37,545	0	0.00%	
Financial expenses	2,225	2,225	0	0.00%	
Purchased and contracted services	235,151	235,151	0	0.00%	
Transfer to own funds	40,000	40,000	0	0.00%	
Capital expense	2,000	2,000	0	0.00%	
	457,265	457,265	0	0.00%	
	541,252	542,325	1,073	0.20%	
TAX LEVY	208,523	210,568	1,045	0.50%	
Full Time Positions	1.0	1.0	-	-	
Part Time Hours	1,220.0	1,220.0	-	-	

If we were to eliminate paid parking, you'd be left with approximately \$179,000 in expenses, which is less than the now almost \$230,000 it's going to cost taxpayers this year.

Breaking down these costs specifically, the City spends \$235,000/year to contract the commissionaires to do downtown parking enforcement. If paid parking were eliminated, gas for those vehicles, as well as maintenance, would no longer be required. Further, the transfer of \$40,000 dollars to own funds, also would no longer be required.

We asked the City what "Transfer to own funds" meant in this case and received a response from City Communications Manager, Tessa Vecchio.

"Transfer to Own funds is a regular budget item you will see on budgets within the Municipality which are approved by Council annually," said Vecchio. "For example, this particular transfer to own funds started in 2013 and is used to purchase pay and display machines. Transfer to own funds typically supports existing infrastructure and future procurement requirements within each department."

In this moment, there is over \$25 million dollars in this year's budget under the line item "transfer to own funds".

You could, however, incur some issues as a result of removing paid parking from the core. Consider that cars parked would potentially stay parked resulting in a lower rate of turnover of vehicles downtown, as well as the loss of jobs for the parking enforcement officers.

In the world of saving money and being fiscally responsible to the taxpayer, this move could potentially save between 20 and 50 thousand dollars a year. It would also remove a barrier that all Councillors agree is an issue to getting people to attend downtown businesses.

Cast your vote in our Community Poll:

Do you feel that year round free parking would attract more people and benefit small businesses in the City's downtown core?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Undecided

Vote

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Dan Gray

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

