

Council ponders changes in permit parking

By Jeanne Davant

Permits for employees and residents who park in city lots would pay more or be required to park in outlying lots under a system proposed to Manitou Springs City Council on Tuesday night.

The idea, according to City Planner Michelle Anthony, is to free up downtown parking for tourists and shoppers by encouraging business owners and employees to park in "lower demand parking areas." Those areas include the Metro District's new Schmischny lot on west Manitou Avenue and the Prospect Place lot two blocks south of Manitou Avenue.

Permit parking also might be sold for the high school parking lot during the summer season and in private parking lots in the downtown area, such as the Congregational Church lot, when agreements are worked out.

For the first half of this year, the city issued 222 permits to businesses and residents, who use the Metro District's Wichita and Canon parking lots. The annual cost was \$150 for one permit, \$100 for two to five permits and \$75 for six or more permits. Those permits were to expire May 31 but were extended until mid-June.

Under the new system, no permits would be sold for the Wichita lot. Permits for the other lots would be sold at the following rates:

- Canon Avenue, 45 spaces: \$120 per permit; 20 permits sold
- Schmischny, 42 spaces: \$75 per permit; 65 permits sold
- Prospect Place, 45 spaces: \$30 per permit; 68 permits sold
- High school, 30 spaces: \$15 per permit; 30 permits sold
- Evening-only permits for all lots, 4 p.m.-10 a.m.: \$15 per permit for 218 spaces
- Other private properties, number of spaces to be determined: \$60-\$ 120 per permit

Those rates apply only for the remainder of this year. Presumably, prices would be higher next year.

The Schmischny and Prospect lots would be "oversold" since it was expected that not all of the spaces would be used at the same time.

Currently, some business owners are required to purchase parking permits for themselves and their employees so they don't have to park on Manitou Avenue.

The plan anticipates that the required permit holders would be assigned to particular lots and that required permit purchasers would fill all 20 permit spaces in the Canon lot.

"We recognize there will be current permit holders who prefer to park in a particular lot that will only be able to purchase a permit in another lot, or may not be able to purchase a permit at all," Anthony wrote in a memo to Council. "However, the proposed plan hopes to address some of the potential unmet demand by bringing Metro's new Schmischny Lot and the City's Prospect Lot into the Permit Parking program."

It would cost \$3,000 to \$4,000 for signs, parking blocks and clean-up to get the Prospect Place lot ready for the new program, Anthony's memo said. Although the costs would not be recouped the first year, "materials like the parking blocks are durable and reusable and without this lot, the parking plan as outlined cannot address the permit parking demand for the downtown." (Full disclosure: The writer lives near the Prospect Place lot.)

Councilwoman Aimee Cox said she has already received complaints about the proposed price increases. "I think there is a need to talk to the community about this," Cox said.

Cass Jones, owner of the Lofts and Shops, said she buys 30 permits a year. Residents of the Lofts can be evicted for parking on Manitou Avenue, under a condition of their leases.

"Will there be a quantity discount?" Jones asked. "At the present price that's proposed, it's becoming cost-prohibitive for us."

Keg owner Mike Milar said he bought 16 spaces last year, but now "I'm back to telling employees, 'you park wherever you can.' "

Tom Rollofson, who lives in an apartment on Manitou Avenue, said he has been parking in the Wichita lot.

"I really feel what's happening is I'm not going to be able to park in a well-lit parking lot close to my apartment," he said. "At the expense of me being a resident, (you would be) doubling the parking fees."

He suggested a shuttle service to outlying lots during peak hours.

Anthony said a shuttle service is being contemplated that would be run by the Cog Railway. Details about the shuttle service were unavailable at press time.

Resident Rick Laurenzi said he has talked to a number of employees and residents who would be affected under the new plan.

"They're livid," Laurenzi said. "They're being evicted... This creates more of a problem in our community this summer."

The Planning Department had requested that Council act on the proposed plan Tuesday night, but Council decided to postpone further consideration until its next meeting, at 7 p.m. June 8.

"I feel we need to have some sort of public meeting on the overall plan and... to invite the Metro Board in," Councilwoman Ingrid Richter said.

In other parking-related business. Council...

- Approved on first reading an ordinance requiring that vehicles parked on city streets must move their vehicles at least a block after the time limit for the initial space expires. The current limit in the downtown area is three hours. The ordinance also extends the time limit for on-street ADA parking spaces from three to four hours.

- Approved on first reading an ordinance changing the make-up of the Parking Authority Board from nine to seven members.

- Approved on first reading an ordinance prohibiting the obstruction of parking enforcement or code enforcement officers, police or firefighters in the performance of their duties.

- Approved the rental of hand-held parking enforcement devices from ParkTrak. These devices enable the parking enforcement officer to scan license plate numbers and issue waterproof thermal printed tickets.

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