

Paid an-street parking discussed at work session

By Anthony Welch

Whether or not to start charging for cars to park downtown on Manitou Avenue was a hot topic of discussion at the Manitou Springs City Council's work session Tuesday night.

Council, along with the Parking Authority Board (PAB), met to hear the results from public workshops and surveys regarding Manitou's infamous parking problems. Kezziah Watkins, a consulting and research firm specializing in strategic and long-term planning, provided the results for Council.

The purpose of the work session was to try and prioritize what recommendations to start taking action on.

While the Kezziah Watkins report said most residents at the workshops polled favored no paid on-street parking, some of those at Tuesday's work session felt it could help in alleviating Manitou's parking issues.

"People have to know that's something that's still being considered," Councilwoman Aimee Cox said.

Council and the PAB talked about how while parking passes, parking lot kiosks and parking tickets are generating approximately \$95,000 a year, there needs to be more revenue streaming in to try and make some of the parking solutions a reality.

"By giving away free parking, we discourage people from going where we want them to go, which is to our paid parking lots," PAB Chair Val St. Cloud said. "That's why the city has it, to generate some revenue."

St. Cloud cited the Carl Walker Parking Management Study, which was conducted in 2007.

He said the report talked of how free parking spaces in downtown Manitou were an untapped resource.

Some of the concerns expressed Tuesday regarding paid on-street parking were how it could affect sales tax. A few wondered whether businesses might suffer a little if parking spaces were no longer free. City Administrator Jack Benson said the sales tax question would have to be answered through a study or consultants.

"Council has paid for expert studies, and they all say we need paid parking," Councilwoman Coreen Toll said. "Why aren't we listening to them?"

Benson added that while free parking is convenient for residents and visitors, it doesn't help the City.

"Free parking undermines everything-we're trying to do. I understand people have strong feelings about it. The way we're going to get our revenue is basically enforce instead of asking them to pay us \$1 an hour," he said. "I ask you to keep that in mind as we look at, what I think are short-term management issues."

St. Cloud mentioned that more parking revenue would start to filter in from the forthcoming kiosk at the Barr Trail parking lot. He said he anticipated anywhere from \$400 to possibly \$1,000 a day could be taken at that lot.

Revenue from paid on-street parking could go towards the city having a shuttle or trolley, which was one of the things residents said the City could try and implement, at least seasonally.

PAB Vice Chair Jay Rohrer said he felt residents could be sold on paid parking if a trolley service was brought back. Cox added she gets a lot of people asking her why the City doesn't use

such a service. The consensus, however, was that cost was a major issue. The group agreed that would be something to look at further down the road.

The group briefly discussed the idea of sharing parking lots with the school district and with the Community Congregational Church, which had said it would be willing to help out. Exploring those options was prioritized to the next 12 months.

Benson mentioned that the City has two parking entities - the PAB and the Metropolitan Parking District - and getting the two to work together is something that should be looked at. Cox said Council has had that discussion many times, but nothing's ever come of it.

"We all have to pool together and go in one direction," Benson said.

"I want to stress the natives are not happy in many regards," St. Cloud said. "I think a city's duty is to its residents."

Cox said she knows there are a lot of frustrations, but there are some steps being taken. She cited the Prospect and Smischny parking lots as well as the Barr Trail lot.

"We are making progress, maybe not as quickly as we'd all like to see," she said.

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