

**PUBLIC MEETING REGARDING PARKING
SLATER ROOM, WARREN PUBLIC LIBRARY
APRIL 9, 2014**

A Public Meeting to unveil the proposed paid parking plan for the City of Warren was held, after appropriate public notice, on Wednesday, April 9, 2014 in the Slater Room of the Warren Public Library. Mayor Maurice Cashman presided over the meeting which he called to order at 5:40 p.m.

In addition to those individuals listed on the attached sign-in sheet which forms a part hereof, Council members Richard Kolcharno and James Zavinski were present as were those members who serve on the Parking Committee: Messrs. Fraser and Lewis and Dr. Ferguson. The Mayor was also present as were the following members of City Staff: Police Chief Raymond Zydonik, City Manager Nancy Freenock, Intern Gregory Wilson, Mike Holtz, DPW Director and City Administrator Mary Ann Nau.

The Mayor commenced the meeting by explaining to the public that Council had not yet reviewed the proposed plan and that the purpose of this meeting was to obtain public comment so that changes, if necessary, could be made before the formal Council presentation. He further indicated that Council will hold a work session on April 16, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers to review the proposed plan. Public comment will also be welcome at that time.

Mayor Cashman stated that the Mid-town lot will not be addressed until it is repaved in 2015; for now, all will remain the same in that location.

The Mayor stated that there is no plan that will satisfy everyone; the plan the Committee is presenting is a way to shift the burden for "free" parking to those that use the City's parking. In other words, to impose a user fee. Those who park on City streets or on City facilities should pay for that privilege and the burden should be shifted from the City's taxpayers to the users of the parking. This is an attempt to address the deficit in the City's Parking Fund.

The Mayor then introduced City Intern Gregory Wilson who is an MPA candidate at Penn State University. Mr. Wilson reminded those present that parking downtown has been a constant problem and at the Council meeting in January, the Mayor appointed three Council members to a Parking Committee to develop a solution to the problems surrounding parking in the City.

The downtown merchants have complained of too little convenient parking in the downtown area; they also expressed frustration with the fact that many of the available spots are used by employees thus leaving no place for customers to park. Mr. Wilson stated that pursuant to a recent study, generally speaking, 14% of workers park downtown occupying 50% of the available spaces. This causes congestion and prevents turnover.

Mr. Wilson then went onto state that Free is not Free. That is, while parking may be free to those that park on the street, the cost for that parking is borne by City taxpayers whose taxes dollars pay for snow plowing, line painting and other maintenance and repair on those same streets where those "free" parkers' park. The parking fund is in a deficit position, with the deficit for 2014 alone projected to be \$171,000. The general fund, the taxpayers, will once again have to subsidize the parking fund unless some action is taken.

Mr. Wilson the presented a short power-point presentation after which the Mayor entertained questions.

Magda Fanaritus stated that:

1. Members of the Women's Club located on Market Street meet twice monthly; their meetings last about 2.5 hours and an hour of parking in that location is not sufficient.
2. The parking spaces in the downtown area are too big.
3. Four spaces are eliminated at each corner and the City cannot raise more money unless it makes the spaces smaller.
4. She goes at 9 a.m. to have her hair and nails done; she may also stay in town for lunch; one hour is not enough.

It was explained that one can pay for more than one hour of parking at a time; the individual decides how much time to purchase dependant on activities planned.

Mrs. Fanaritus also suggested that one parking spot be removed from East Street to make it safe for pedestrian to cross.

Charlene Hoffman asked for a list of the number of spaces in each lot and also a breakdown of the fund deficit. She also asked why a permit in the garage would decrease from \$40/month to \$30/month.

Dr. Ferguson stated that the decrease is an incentive to move people off of the street where it will cost \$160/month to park. Mrs. Hoffman also suggested that a kiosk be located indoors to protect from adverse weather conditions.

Mrs. Hoffman also inquired about purchasing a pre-paid spot or ticket. Mrs. Hoffman stated that she cannot park a large SUV in the garage as the turning radius it too small. Chief Zydonik stated that there is nothing that can be done about that at this point. Mr. Lewis indicated that he has not problem taking his Toyota Tundra up in the garage. Mr. Lewis stated that for personnel reasons, the City has had only one enforcement officer. It is in a position to bring on another, and more if necessary.

Marion Aronoyos of Glade Township stated that her husband who parks in the garage will be thrilled in the price decrease. She indicated that if all of the spaces were filled, that would generate \$72,000 and that would be a great thing. She indicated that too many people abuse the two hour parking.

Mrs. Aronoyos stated that 55 individuals reside at Canterbury Court. There is not enough onsite parking for Helpmates who come in daily. She asked that they be permitted to park for more than 15 minutes.

It was suggested that as part of the roll-out of the parking program, the City contact major employers and offer them the opportunity to purchase spots for their employees; the tax benefits should be explained to them.

Mrs. Lucia stated that she goes to the market on Pennsylvania Avenue to purchase milk. She will now have to add \$1.00 to the price of the milk if she has to pay to park. It was explained that the meters are calibrated to accept payment for less that 1 hour.

Mrs. Lucia also suggested that this presentation be presented to the Downtown Warren Partnership.

Pauline Steinmeyer stated that the City is making an assumption about who the users are. If they are employees, then it is incumbent upon the employer to provide parking. Betts and Superior are expected to provide for their employees.

Mrs. Steinmeyer stated that other improvements made over the last decade which were to result in savings to the City resulted in a deficit. She pointed to the garage and the installation of the gates at the Mid-town lot in particular. She wondered about the cost and assurances that it would generate revenue.

Mrs. Steinmeyer also expressed concern about tourists coming into the City. How will they feel about this system?

Mayor Cashman stated that tourists know how to obtain information about parking either before visiting a City or when they first arrive. He cited his experience in Durango, CO. Ms. Freenock suggested that parking maps could be posted throughout the City. Also, the City could provide smaller maps that can be given to merchants etc. to distribute.

Dr. Ferguson stated that there are two core values which must be considered:

1. It is inherently unfair for residents to subsidize parking through property tax dollars.
2. The City must create a program that does the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

The assumption must be that people must be self sufficient.

Dr. Ferguson went on to state that there were unanticipated things that occurred at the garage; it needed an extensive repair. People have a choice-since there will now be a fee to park on the street, they can opt to park in the garage.

Dr. Hoffman stated that he pays for his employees to park. He does not want his employees to use spots that can be used by his patients. Market Street lost spots when right and left turn lanes were added.

Dr. Hoffman inquired how much staff time will be needed to validate his patients' parking? He also stated that the parking in front of the post office is abused. Others jumped in to say that it is the fault of the post office. It is understaffed thus causing people to spend more time in there to conduct business.

Joseph Sprentz suggested that the City consider leasing kiosks as opposed to purchasing them. He also stated that several years ago, the City's parking Fund had a \$500,000 surplus. The City repaired the garage and it dipped into the surplus to do so; last year, Council spent a lot of time discussing a dedicated tax for paving. That suggestion did not pass. He stated that the City was going to pay one way or another. Imposing a user's fee is a great start to the parking program.

Dr. Ferguson stated that he supported the dedicated tax for a specific period of time; that was not the majority opinion of council however.

Marty Hegstrum stated that he lives in Glade Run which was annexed by the City without permission in the 1920s. His points were as follows:

1. He only uses the spots in front of the post office and the Mid-town lot; he is not going to walk a long way to put money in a meter;

2. France and Germany have banned the use of WiFi and the internet because they cause cancer and the proposed system relies on both;
3. \$171,000 –of 5,000 people paying taxes, that amounts to \$40/head. That's coming out of our pockets not yours;
4. There are two open gravel lots on Clark Street; why not pave and use for parking? Put in meters;
5. He will never use the new system;
6. URC is trying to buy South Street School and will move out of the City and that will free up parking;
7. The lines at the post office are too long;
8. There is no where to park on Liberty Street; too many loading zones which were not there previously. Let the trucks park like everyone else.
9. Angle the parking on Liberty Street;
10. People don't know how to drive and damage the roads.

Mrs. Fanaritus stated that we would be losing the 15 minutes spots; Mr. Cashman stated that parking is always a problem.

Mrs. Hoffman asked about comparables-other communities of Warren's size-did they realize the projected revenues?

Alan Sowers stated that something merchant friendly is needed downtown. There is no turnover in parking spaces. The same people are always parking downtown and this increases cost. He suggested that the City purchase a lot outside of the City and bus people in for \$3/day.

Mrs. Steinmeyer asked how much this program will cost and how it will be financed.

Dr. Ferguson stated that if we don't try, we cannot succeed. If we don't try, we cannot move forward.

Mayor Cashman stated that the problems with the garage were unforeseeable. The proposed hotel was to take up many of the spaces. In addition, NWSB agreed to build its new facility in Warren provided that the City construct a garage.

Mrs. Steinmeyer urged Council to take a critical look at this proposal. The economy has not improved.

The Mayor stated that this is a way to attack the deficit fund; that needs to be done.

Dr. Ferguson reiterated that an individual always has a choice-to park in a paid space or not. We cannot compare the past to the present. There are too many variables to be considered one of which is the increased cost of paving. We are where we are. Dr. Ferguson reiterated that it is not right for the taxpayers to subsidize free parking with no return. He stated that this proposal is made in good faith.

Dr. Ferguson summed up by stating that City staff and the Committee would look into:

1. Placing some kiosks under cover;
2. The ability to prepay for time;
3. Parking arrangements at the post office, Canterbury Court and the Library;
4. Some place out of the City where people can park and be bussed into the City;
5. A more exact cost of the program.

Dr. Ferguson stated that what won't work is the status quo. The cost of maintaining infrastructure must be shared by all that benefit from it.

Mrs. Fanaritus stated that there is not much new building downtown. CVS provided parking when it constructed its store. A&B also put in parking. The shops along PA Avenue have parking that can be accessed behind them. The Blue Banner has no access and that is bad.

Mr. Zavinski thanked the Committee for its work. He stated that he was disappointed in the turnout for tonight's meeting. He asked about the reduction in permitting fees for the garage from \$35 to \$30. Dr. Ferguson reiterated that it is an incentive to remove vehicles from the streets.

Mr. Zavinski also asked about the hand-held units. How many enforcement officers will the City employ? Chief Zydonik stated that would depend – 2 perhaps 3 depending on the roll-out.

Marty Hegstrum asked why not sign the garage: Park at your own risk? He also asked why parking rates could not be assigned based on a wage scale.

Mike Corbin stated that he likes the proposed system. He has chalked cars and people catch on; they just learn to move their cars a little to avoid fines.

Josh Cotton asked if, once the program generates revenue, the General Fund would be repaid first. Mr. Wilson responded that would be a decision for the Finance Committee who would figure out the best way to implement this program.

There being no further questions, the meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Freenock, City Clerk