

**WARREN CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
APRIL 16, 2014**

A work session of the Council of the City of Warren was held on Wednesday, April 16, 2014 in Council Chambers. Mayor Cashman called the session to order at 6:00 p.m. All Council members, with the exception of Mr. Kolcharno were present. The following members of City staff were also present: Mary Ann Nau, Raymond Zydinock, Michael Holtz, Donna Risinger, Gregory Wilson and Nancy Freenock.

Mayor Cashman stated that the purpose of the meeting was for the parking plan proposed by the Parking Committee to be explained to all of Council. Council members will be asked to comment after which comment from the public will be taken. Mr. Cashman stated that it is his belief that for the parking plan to work, on-street parking must be the most expensive option, followed by parking in the mid-town lot, street permits and finally the garage. If parking both in the mid-town lot and on the street were \$1.00/hour, then there would be no incentive to park in the lot.

The Mayor also stated that parking in the downtown, on-street spots is proposed at .25 for 15 minutes; it is not a minimum of \$1/hour. For those spots controlled by kiosk, the minimum credit card charge is \$1.00.

Gregory Wilson reviewed a power point presentation with Council that examined the cost of "free" parking, mentioned the growing deficit in the parking fund which annually is subsidized by the General Fund, to the City's detriment, and explained the proposed parking plan.

Comments by Council members:

Mr. Fraser:

- a) stated that the Committee must re-examine the plan with an eye toward identifying those areas where parking meters would be beneficial due to rapid turnover.
- b) stated that the currently proposed budget contains no new money for maintenance and repair. This was not included because maintenance is not a new line item; it is already in the approved budget but it, and the previously existing revenue, can be added to the projections in this plan.
- c) asked if it was prudent to fund depreciation. It would be prudent if Council were to fund that line item and if those funds were going to be used to replace parking equipment. The hand-helds must be replaced every three years; the kiosks have a useful life of seven years.

Mr. Lewis:

- a) stated that the area near Crone's should be metered. He also indicated that handicapped spots should be in that vicinity as well. Mr. Lewis also questioned why the Committee is not using all meters?
- b) Further, kiosks charge a fee to credit/debit card users. If meters with only the ability to accept coins are used, there are no additional costs to the consumer/City. If kiosks are used, the Committee should explore actual costs.
- c) stated that the kiosks are powered by solar batteries that can charge with 40% sunlight. The charge life is not that long so when the battery loses power, it will have to be replaced or removed and recharged.
- d) Indicated that there is currently little visible enforcement. A plan that will work equally for everyone is needed. The two-hour parking has been a disaster. What will adequate enforcement cost? Should there be three MEOs and one person dedicated to maintenance?

Dr. Ferguson:

- a) believes that areas with quick turnover should be accommodated i.e. coffee shop, take out deli etc. and that Council should take the word of the merchant for where this occurs.
- b) is not enamored with meters as they are archaic. Further, he is not in favor of drilling holes in the new streetscape area.
- c) still has questions concerning validations. Currently, one pays to get out. With the new system, they will be paying to get in. The transition must be planned.
- d) believes that the forgiveness period is important.
- e) no one parks at St. Joseph's School. Suggests that all proposed paid parking by General Joseph Warren Park be removed. Paid parking is a real cost and should be examined as a % of income.
- f) charging for parking is long overdue but developing a plan is challenging because the plan should do the greatest good for the greatest number of people and because everyone should be treated fairly. It is not fair for property taxes to be used to subsidize "free" parking. The downtown property owners are also paying for this parking. Those who do not use the parking should not have to pay for it.

Mr. Lewis added that property taxes also support the school system. Those on fixed incomes who no longer have children in school still must pay to support the schools. Council has the ability to shift some of the burden for parking off of the taxpayers.

- g) Some kiosks should be under cover; consideration should be given to having kiosks in various lobbies'.

Ms. Freenock stated that kiosks can be ADA accessible – at car height. Mr. Fraser suggested that car height kiosks be placed at both entrances to the mid-town lot and that they be under cover.

Mayor Cashman indicated that some kiosks should be under cover. If kiosks are placed in buildings, he is concerned that someone will be ticked while inside paying at a kiosk.

Mr. Cashman suggested that the kiosks be rolled out initially in the mid-town lot so that the public can get used to them; however, this is not in the 2014 budget. Mr. Cashman further suggested that the Parking Committee look at all of the suggestions and come back to Council.

Mr. Zavinski:

- a) people are in favor of a change in downtown parking but what change is appropriate?
- b) the proposal is a good plan and is worth a try; there are no guarantees. \$1/hour is too high-what about .75/hour?
- c) Also thinks meters should be placed in front of St. Joseph's.

Mr. Cashman reiterated that if it is .75/hour on street, there will be no incentive for people to park in the lot. Kiosks are also more flexible if the City decides to change parking rates. Mr. Cashman also likes the ability to use paper money or plastic.

Mr. Harvey:

Mr. Harvey inquired about the cost of free parking; he asked about the deficit in the parking fund and asked for detail. Mr. Harvey also expressed concern about residential parking control.

Mr. Lewis exited the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Comments from the Public:

Julia Tarr:

- a) Parking fees = user fees but the taxpayers are the users and they are already paying through their property taxes; Council is trying to double dip; will there be a decrease in taxes?
- b) is Council really trying to charge visitors?
- c) Poses a problem for non-profits – traffic drives awareness; main goal is to keep people downtown;
- d) The system as it operates today is not a problem for my store
- e) The two hour zone is confusing; just take away the zones
- f) None of my customers are in favor of paid parking
- g) 90% of customers are local not visitors; concern that people will stop coming downtown
- h) Not in favor of kiosks

- i) Keep areas near banks and Frailey's metered; will the existing meters stay?
- j) Permits only in designated areas; does not want someone to park for 8 hours in front of her store; the turnover is good for her customer base; she polices parking in front of her store
- k) Try kiosks midtown-everyone will suffer due to a few abusers
- l) Look at parking garage to generate revenues
- m) Credit card fees no one charges 3%; are between 5 and 7 %

Mark Burger, M.D.

- a) Wife owns Vita Bella; understands focus on revenue to cover debt service;
- b) Should study what is the impact on business
- c) Should compare business now and one year after paid parking is implemented
Will there be more or less traffic?
City must save money but if sales tax decreases, the City will lose money

Chris Burger:

- a) Has same concerns as Julia; how to stop all day parking in front of her shop\offer discount to employers to fill garage?

Sue Spencer:

- a) Businesses are afraid that customers will not come if have to pay for parking;
- b) Appreciates vastness of task
- c) Want tourists and have worked hard to draw them into Warren
- d) How will someone new to Warren understand the payment system?
- e) Likes parking meters even though they are old school

Julia Tarr:

- a) Sue is correct; some businesses are hanging on by a thread
- b) There are vacant store fronts
- c) 2013 was the worst year for retail
- d) Big Blue is underutilized; maximize income potential there
- e) How will the free to paid transition work? Roll out a little at a time?

Mayor Cashman stated that this is not the last meeting. The Parking Committee will continue to work and will consider all of the comments that have been made. Council has sought public input; he expressed disappointment in the attendance tonight and also at the public meeting.

Mr. Harvey stated that there are costs to businesses. With free parking, customers drive around the block looking for an open spot. Paid parking should keep more spots open. People will spend \$2.00 in gas to drive to North Warren; it takes time to drive there. Parking is not "free" at Wal-Mart.

Mr. Zavinski stated that there are a number of open spots in the garage. In the summer, some of the garage users go out in search of free parking as they do not mind the walk.

The Mayor closed the meeting at 7:55 by stating that there is no perfect solution. He urged the Parking Committee to continue its work.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Freenock, City Clerk