

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the Yakima City Council

From: Dave Zabell, Interim City Manager

Date: March 29, 2024

RE: Recommendations on Downtown Parking Regulations and Operations

The old adage that “a well-defined problem is a problem half-solved” applies in the matter of downtown parking. The parking problem means different things to different businesses, and also property owners, employees and consumers. The problem differs for businesses and property owners depending on proximity to the public parking lots, reliance on on-street parking, and differ based on the perspective of these groups, as do the desired solutions. Developing a plan that works best for all is the task of the decision-makers, the City Council in this matter, and necessarily will be a plan that provide few with everything they would like, but the vast majority, or perhaps all, with a plan they can accept and support.

The current moratorium on parking enforcement in the downtown core, while necessary to allow the opportunity for the public outreach, intake, evaluation, and ultimately the development of a plan shaped by robust public input, has also had an unintended consequence. The lack of parking enforcement of on-street parking has resulted in the spaces in and around many downtown businesses to be taken up by all-day parking. Similarly, the lots are feeling the pressure of all-day parking by some. The importance of parking space turnover to businesses has been well-illustrated by the situation and the impacts of the lack of turnover is being felt by many downtown businesses in the form of business loss due to a lack of convenient spaces for customer use. Likewise, businesses near the public lots have felt the effect of fewer lot spaces available due to an increased number of vehicles utilizing the lots for all-day parking.

The results of the most recent effort to develop a downtown parking proposal over the past 60-days were presented to the City Council at the March 26, 2024 study session in the form of recommendations. These recommendations took into consideration the input received from the two earlier public meetings on the topic, as well as numerous inputs from business owners/operators and members of the public over the past months. Not every suggestion or solution raised is incorporated into the recommendations as there are many competing needs with respect to parking in the downtown core and conflicting opinions on the best use of parking infrastructure, the public lots and on-street parking.

Based on the input received throughout this process, it is uniformly recognized that some level of regulation of the public lots and on-street parking is necessary to assure the turnover in parking spaces that downtown businesses need to survive and thrive. The recommendations represent staff’s attempt to balance the many competing needs in the regulations and utilization of the lots and on-street parking. As background, the recommendations related to the regulation of parking are as follows:

1. Regulation of on-street parking – Retain free parking limited to two hours, enforce consistently. Review time limits based on request, adjustment as appropriate.
2. Regulation of public parking lots – Retain free parking limited to two hours, enforce consistently.
3. Monthly parking permit – Retain the \$50/month fee for parking lots. One permit for all four lots. The monthly parking permit fee is based on the premise that revenues from the lots (not fines) would be sufficient to fund the cost of lot maintenance.
4. Parking infraction – Reduce the fine from \$50 to \$20.
5. Allocation of permits spaces – Reduce the number of monthly permits from 60% of the total spaces to 40% and monitor for adequacy.

Council action is necessary in order to implement items 4 and 5. Items 1 and 2 will be in place once the moratorium expires. Modification to the monthly parking permit fee, item 3, would require Council action.

Related Policy Issues:

1. Lot maintenance and repair – Incremental and ongoing repair of the lots. With pavement preservations efforts, cleaning, drainage maintenance, signing, this represents an estimated cost of \$25,000 - \$30,000 annually.
2. Application of technology – Explore the possibility and costs associated with extending parking in the public parking lots through imposition of an hourly rate and use of QR code technology. Staff is recommending a quick turnaround of 60-days or less on this effort to present Council with options and anticipated impacts.

Council confirmation/direction regarding items 1 and 2 is requested.

Operational issues:

1. Need for coordination with business owners/operators.
2. Robust public outreach effort in partnership with businesses.
3. Eliminate differentiation between monthly pass and two-hour free parking stalls.
4. Continued outreach and dialogue with businesses on parking issues.
5. Working to assure owners/operators understand the process for modifications to on-street limits.

Council confirmation of these strategies requested.

To be successful, the City will need to continue working closely with the business community to monitor the effectiveness of the regulations ultimately determined by the City Council, as well as the other activities listed above related to the downtown public parking lots and on-street parking, and make appropriate regulatory and/or operational adjustments as needed to maximize the value of the public parking infrastructure to the benefit of downtown businesses and their customers.