

**BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
September 10, 2013**

Members Present:

Don Olsen, Chairperson
Steve Bruggeman

Will Gilbert
Bob Carr

Mike Craighill
Joni Harman

Members Absent:

Tabitha Frasca

Leticia Moore

Others Present:

Brian Thompson
Greg Krueger

Pat Weber
Saree Couture

Lisa Harmon
Megan Hodson

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Don called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Brian Thompson, a downtown business owner, is present as a guest.

MINUTES

Bob moved to approve the July minutes. Joni seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

REPORTS

Credit Cards

Pat Weber, Finance Director, stated he has not received any complaints regarding the credit card transactions. He said there have been a few one dollar transactions, and for the most part the garage attendants have been using good discretion about making exceptions on running credit cards.

Bob asked if Parking could charge a fee for processing credit card payments. Pat said the fee runs between 2-3%, and the higher the dollar amount, the smaller the fee. Pat said for example if the garage attendant ran a card for \$.50, the fee might be 15%. He also explained Finance cannot carve Parking out from other City departments to charge a fee, and the system is not capable to calculate a fee. Pat said the credit cards are working well in both Park 2 and Park 3.

Pat said the Yearend Parking Report is better than the prior year. He said when the Park 2 Expansion was refinanced for Fiscal Year 2013, Parking did not have to make a debt service payment, which is about \$500,000. He also explained Parking received approximately a \$200,000 rebate from NorthWestern Energy for the lighting upgrade.

Monthly Reports

Saree explained Parking has been pretty steady. She said the Park and Shops were up at Park 2 in July. Joni asked Saree to explain what "actual" means on the report. Saree said actual means the number of actual physical spaces in the garages.

Joni asked why the percentage was high on the report. Don said Parking over rents spaces. Saree added over renting is a great practice because on any given day not everyone will be there to park. She said it is in Parking's best interest to maximize over renting to the extent Parking can stretch it to.

Greg asked why Park 2 shows 77 actual assigned spaces, but currently shows 80 spaces rented. He added assigned should be dedicated, reserved spots. Saree stated she does not know why the report shows that, but believes the number should be 80 not 77. She said she will find out the reason the report says 80, but also thinks Park 2 could be over renting the spaces for rotational purposes.

Greg asked if there were still 8 spaces available at Park 1 in the assigned area. Saree said yes. Greg asked if Parking could rent the assigned spaces in Park 1 for \$75/month instead of \$100/month, to get the spaces rented. Don said his concern would be the other customers paying \$100/month. Greg said maybe Parking could charge \$75 for the first few months, and then charge \$100 thereafter. Saree suggested billing the customers who already rent only \$75/month. Saree said she will talk to the garage attendant and Megan about campaigning for the spaces to be rented. Steve suggested changing the assigned spaces back to monthly reserved and charging \$50/month. Saree said she would take that into consideration. Steve said if Park 1 has a waiting list for monthly reserved, then Parking could get the vacant spaces rented. Greg suggested putting a "For Rent" sign on the garage.

Saree said the lease space that Downtown Subs rented is ready to be on the market. She said the space that World Class Travel was in has some code issues, and believes, with some renovation, the space could be leased out again. Steve recommended putting the "Space for Rent" on the DBA's website. Greg agreed.

Empire Parking Garage Update

Saree said she had a scheduling conflict and did not attend the most recent meeting. She said the work is progressing. Saree explained one issue is trying to find a solution for starting the masonry work while the decks are going in, therefore keeping the masonry work out of the winter months. She said one of the problems would be multiple mobilizations for the masonry person, instead of one.

Bob asked how the timeline for completion was looking. Saree said the timeline has not changed and believes construction was running a little ahead of schedule.

Saree said there has been a complaint from the owner of Western Pawn regarding blocking of the street in front of his business on the weekends. She explained to the owner it is a Traffic Control Plan situation, and there cannot be any alternations because it confuses motorists.

Saree said she will email an update to the Board after the next meeting.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Northern Hotel/First Avenue North parking meters

Saree said Terry Smith mailed a formal request to the State regarding the meters being replaced on 1st Avenue North between North 27th Street and North 28th Street. She has not heard anything back yet from Mr. Smith or the State on what is happening. She said hopefully within the next few weeks she will hear something back.

Minnesota Avenue/North 27th Parking Lot Layout

Saree said she met with Bob Marvin and he is under contract to redesign Minnesota Avenue. She explained he is 30% ready and will have the plans ready in about two weeks to go to quotes. Saree said the City has reviewed and approved the plan. She added the bike lane will go away and no meters will be placed in the area.

Don asked if the redesign will be done by this fall. Saree said yes, weather permitting.

Saree said Parking is not under contract with Bob Marvin to redesign the North 27th Lot. She said money was a question that came up in the discussion. Saree said there would need to be some excavation done in the lot, meaning a lot of work. She said Bruce McCandless' reaction was not that great regarding the work Mr. Marvin has proposed. Saree agreed to meet Mr. Marvin in the North Lot to discuss his ideas before dismissing them and asked the Board if they would like to join her. Saree said she believes the Minnesota Avenue redesign will cost around \$8,500, and the North Lot redesign would be around \$5,000.

Meter Bags

Don asked to waive the rules regarding public comment because Brian Thompson, owner of a downtown business, is present to discuss the Meter Bags. The Board agreed.

Saree stated Parking is receiving complaints about businesses renting meter bags for personal use. She said meter bag #63 has been stolen, and enforcement is looking out for it. Saree said two of the businesses are engineering companies, and the other one is an exploration company. She believes the businesses have legitimate reasons to rent the bags. She said the one bag that was stolen was rented by the exploration company, and they are requesting a new bag. Saree said Parking is requesting a police report before renting another bag to the company. She said the company brings samples from exploration vehicles in and out of the business.

Saree said she has considered the idea of expanding and clarifying the meter bag rental policy. She explained the garage attendants currently rent out the meter bags and thinks that is somewhat a mistake. She thinks for convenience it is one place to do it, but she believes Parking should be renting out of the office in City Hall. Saree suggested the DBA could also rent the meter bags, if they wished to do so. Saree thinks it is harder for the customers to interact business wise with the booths than it is at a window.

Don said expanding historically, the meter bags have been used for contractors who do work downtown and for buses. Don inquired whether he could rent meter bags because he is with an engineering company. Saree said there are complications with parking in the area because of construction. She thinks it either revolves around parking challenges, or it is a legitimate issue. She said the exploration company has requested the bag for a short term. Saree thinks the policy is pretty broad, and refining the policy would help the garage attendants out. Saree said she is personally asking the garage attendants to notify her about any meter bag request, because she wants to look the requests over.

Saree said she asked Megan if the exploration company was on the Empire Garage waiting list, and Megan said no. Don asked how big the waiting list for the Empire Garage is. Megan said the list is huge. Saree added no one has refined the list, but maybe by December someone should make the people on the list commit. Don said first the Board needs to finish the conversation on how much Parking will charge for the spaces, who gets reserved, and etc.

Mike asked in regards to the exploration company situation, does it seem more fitting for the company to get a commercial loading permit than a meter bag. Saree said typically the permits are not interim, and this situation is an interim need. Mike said the loading permits are cheaper than renting a meter bag. Saree agreed it would be cheaper. Mike said the company would come out ahead and it would also free up parking. Mike said the permits are only \$12/year and the company's need seems to be more of that type of situation. Saree said the situation is of a different nature than just loading and unloading for 20 minutes. Bob said it sounds like people with the company are going in and visiting more than a couple times a day and staying longer than 20 minutes.

Don said it sounds like the company is getting cheap parking on the street for the whole day. Will asked what happens when the next guy comes along and is carrying boxes in and out all day long.

Brian Thompson said in this particular incident, he has witnessed this company plug meters and shuffle over the past few years. He said this circumstance came up when the ordinance came out that the parker has to move after 2 hours and cannot park on the same block. Mr. Thompson has witnessed the people with the meter bags go from plugging, to shuffling, and now getting the bags for the meters. He said the people are not coming and going, and they are using the bags for convenient parking. Mr. Thompson believes the policy is very loose on the rules, and his customers are complaining there are no spaces to park in. He said the block his business is on has 14 meters and there are roughly between 8 or 9 meters bagged.

Saree said there is good indication that the companies who are renting these bags are cheating. She thinks Parking can get around renting the companies bags by reviewing the policy and saying that is not the intent of renting the meter bags. Mr. Thompson wants to be part of the solution. Saree said she will offer the companies the available spaces in Park 1.

Mike asked if Mr. Thompson could call Parking and ask for the company's information who is renting the bag. Saree said absolutely, Mr. Thompson could get the reason why the company is renting the bag, but not the name and address. She believes Parking is vulnerable, because the garage attendants make the decision on who rents the bags without any review.

Mike asked Saree how she will approach the companies renting the bags to get them back, for example will she make a phone call. Saree believes these companies are abusing the system. Mike said the rule is very vague and does not want someone to sue Parking because Parking says the companies cannot rent the bags anymore. Saree said the policy is an internal document and she can modify and clarify the document. She also believes a meter bag application will need to be filled out and reviewed by her. Joni asked regarding the particular case can Saree retroactively review it. Saree said yes, and she will tell the companies there have been complaints made regarding personal usage of the meter bags for securing personal parking spaces.

Saree said she thinks the form is incomplete and needs to be adjusted. Lisa said in the meantime the garage attendants need to be contacting Saree when the bags are being rented. Mike asked if Saree wants input on rewriting the policy. Saree said yes. Mr. Thompson said a definitive term (of rental duration) on the meter bag would be helpful. Don asked Saree to propose a draft of the new policy for the next meeting. Saree said yes, and she will take care of the companies abusing the meter bags.

Parking Commission

Don asked if the Board is going to get the message out to the citizens about voting yes to amending the City Charter. Lisa said the DBA is hosting a parking forum on Tuesday, September 24th, at First Interstate Bank Operations Center, and there will be two parking professionals flying in to discuss parking. Lisa said she wants her members to be informed about what the vote means and how to vote. Lisa said she would be happy if the City would like to be a partner at the forum and she invited everyone to attend.

Saree asked if the forum would be informational only and not to persuade people to vote yes. Lisa said the forum is informational. Saree said the City should be there. Lisa said the press release can say Downtown Billings Alliance and the City of Billings together are hosting a public forum on Parking. Lisa said she will finish the press release and email it to Saree to look at. Saree said she would run it by Tina Volek since Bruce McCandless is gone. Lisa said the City has to look at everything before they can put the City's logo on it.

Don said he is concerned that the election will happen and the citizens will not be educated about the amendment. Saree said she believes there can be groups formed to campaign for the amendment. Greg said it would be a good idea to call Ed Kemmick and any other reporters. Lisa said she is sending out a media email.

Lisa said the Montana Downtown Conference, combined with the Chamber's Business Conference and Expo, is at the Northern Hotel and will be September 25th-27th. She said it will be about downtown issues, one of which is downtown parking. Lisa said the conference will be great and will include business management and everything to run offices efficiently.

DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE REPORT

Greg said he is waiting to hear back from the Department of Revenue about the taxable value of the Northern Hotel. They submitted a request for their tax increment reimbursement, and they cannot do that until he hears back from the Department of Revenue.

Lisa said the BID completed the Crime Watch for Business pamphlet, and Harley and Shane distributed the pamphlets to the downtown businesses. She said the pamphlet is a great resource for the businesses downtown and has numbers of businesses to contact, that are on the same block, if there are any suspicious things happening.

Lisa said Shane Winden made Sergeant and will be leaving. The DBA has hired a new officer, Matthew Lennick, and he will be starting soon.

Lisa stated a new project they are working on is the signal box, which is a public art project and a graffiti deterrent. The DBA is taking 6 traffic signal boxes and wrapping them in art. Lisa said Public Works is funding some of the traffic signal boxes. The first traffic signal box will be under Sky Point during Harvest Fest.

Lisa said the alleyscape is still being pursued on North 29th Street. She said there has been some funding for the Pocket Parks, and the BID is also up for renewal.

Lisa said there have been discussions regarding the events in the downtown area. She said she has been working with Public Works to help get some boundaries on having events in downtown, and she will be going to Council with Public Works.

Greg said there have been new signs put up at Park 1 for the weekend patrons to know there is free parking available inside the garage. He said hopefully there could be an official sign integrated that looks like the signs on the garage. Saree agreed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

AGENDA

There were no items to discuss.

Saree said Mike Herem resigned from his position in Maintenance, and Parking filled the position internally with Mike Hoscheit. She said also there is another Parking employee interviewing at the Airport. She thinks staff turnover could be an issue in the coming months. Saree said she spoke with Bruce and agreed to keep moving on and filling the vacant positions. Lisa said she appreciates what Saree is doing. Saree said it is unnerving because she is not doing full justice at either of her jobs right now, but that is the way it is. She said there is a lot of good work to be done. Saree said Megan has been helping out with some extra work, which has been a huge help.

Saree said she is also in the process of bringing in a lead person for maintenance in Parking. She said she is going to have more hours put directly against maintenance, and the person is not from Parking, but from Facilities. Saree talked to Bruce McCandless and he is okay with the arrangement. She said he is a phenomenal individual, and he is currently doing maintenance in Facilities while she is off working in Parking. She said this will help her, so she doesn't lose track on the progress of the maintenance programs, and will also help get the maintenance programs upped on the Parking side, for example, direction, follow up, and attention. Saree said this seems to be something the Staff has greatly appreciated and responded to very well. She also stated she is very excited for Mike Hoscheit to be in the maintenance side of Parking.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.