



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 23, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Public Hearing, Second Reading and Final Passage of an Ordinance to amend Section 5-8-84: Pay by Phone Parking Fee within a Residential Permit Parking District and make Permanent this Residential Parking Preservation Program in Old Town. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Consideration of an ordinance to amend Section 5-8-84 to make permanent the pilot program and modify the pay by phone parking requirement as an ongoing option for residential parking restrictions for a designated area of Old Town.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council consider the proposed ordinance for second reading, public hearing and final passage on Saturday, February 23, 2019, making this pilot residential parking preservation program permanent.

BACKGROUND: One of the parking management goals of the 2015 Old Town Area Parking Study (OTAPS) Work Group was to "Preserve parking on residential blocks for residents and guests." In response, a pilot program for a pay by phone parking requirement for residential blocks was implemented in November 2016 with the stated goal "to preserve on-street parking for residents by encouraging non-residents to park in metered spaces or garages by eliminating 'free' two- or three-hour parking on residential blocks."

The pilot program allowed the City to expand the pay by phone option to non-metered residential blocks, where it was previously only available on metered commercial blocks. Elements of the pilot program are listed below:

- Covers the area east of Washington Street between Princess Street and Wolfe Street.
- To be eligible for the program, blocks must be adjacent to an existing metered block or residential pay by phone block.
- Staff require a petition signed by at least 50% of the residents of the block stating they wish to enact a pay by phone requirement on their block to initiate the process.
 - After verifying the petition is valid and the block meets the eligibility criteria (observed 75% occupancy), the request is reviewed by the Traffic and Parking Board as a public hearing item.
- The signage is consistent with the meter signage with "District X permit exempt" language at the bottom.
- The parking fee (currently \$1.75 per hour) is the same rate as on metered blocks and applies only to vehicles without a valid resident, guest or visitor permit for the parking district.
- The hours the parking fee is applicable are required to be consistent with the current hours and days posted for the block.

- For those people who choose to pay to park on these blocks, there are three payment options:
 - Via smartphone with the ParkMobile app
 - By calling a toll-free number and registering the parking session through ParkMobile
 - By displaying a receipt on the dashboard from a meter on a nearby block

The pilot program term expires on March 1, 2019. In order to determine if the program should continue, staff conducted an evaluation of the program including community feedback, parking occupancy surveys, and parking enforcement feedback and data. Based on the pilot program results to date, it is recommended that this pilot program be made permanent.

DISCUSSION: If City Council chooses to modify, extend beyond March 1, 2019 and/or make the program permanent, the City Code will need to be amended. Attachment 1 includes draft language making the program permanent. Below is a summary of the pilot program evaluation and proposed recommendations for continuation with modifications.

Pilot Program Evaluation:

With the implementation of the pilot program, staff indicated the program would be considered an effective tool if parking occupancy survey results showed a minimum of 1 to 2 parking spaces were now available to residents on the pay by phone blocks and that parking issues did not simply shift to another block. Staff also indicated the importance of feedback from the residents of both the pay by phone blocks and adjacent blocks to determine if they felt this tool improved or worsened the parking conditions on their block.

Based on these guidelines defined with the pilot program, staff considered three main aspects of the pilot program to evaluate its success and determine if it should be continued as is, continued with modifications, or discontinued: community feedback, parking occupancy surveys in the program area, and feedback and data from parking enforcement. See Attachment 3 for a summary of the evaluation presented at the Traffic and Parking Board in November 2018.

Community Feedback - Community feedback was evaluated primarily through an online feedback form. All residents in the pilot program area received a mailing with directions to the online feedback form, announcements with links to the form were posted on eNews, Facebook, and Twitter. Previous contacts who had commented or inquired about the program were emailed the link directly. Input was also communicated to staff by phone calls and emails from residents, institutions, and businesses.

There were 131 complete responses provided through the feedback form, and the main takeaways from this input were:

- The majority (79%) of residents of blocks with residential pay by phone who responded to the survey indicated that they felt parking was more available on their block than before the program.
- 76% of residents of blocks with residential pay by phone indicated the guest permit process was easy and did not need changes.
- The most common preferences for the process of petitioning for residential pay by phone were maintaining the existing process (30%), no Traffic and Parking Board hearing required if a petition is signed by 50% of residents (26%), and no Traffic and Parking Board hearing required if a petition is signed by 75% of residents (20%).
- Most respondents (64%) preferred that meters not be installed on blocks in the program.
- The majority of respondents (69%) indicated they would not like the residential pay by phone area to be expanded to other blocks adjacent to metered areas.
- A total of 67% indicated they would like the program to continue when the pilot program expires, with 44% indicating they would like the program to continue as-is and 23% indicating they would like the program to continue with modifications.

Some common comments received through the feedback form and from emails and calls to staff were that parking restrictions were not being adequately enforced, that visitors were confused about how and where to pay and park, and that there should be more efforts to encourage non-residents to park off-street. Many residents gave positive comments about how the residential pay by phone program has made parking easier and more available to them.

Staff also received feedback regarding the impact of the program on St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The church conducted their own parking survey to gauge feedback on parking amongst their parishioners. The church's survey results (Attachment 4) showed that most parishioners (85% of respondents) were unfavorable towards the parking restrictions on blocks surrounding St. Paul's, indicating they cause inconvenience, increase the cost of attending the services, or discourage them from attending church events. Staff have met with representatives of the church to identify their top concerns and discuss potential solutions including a resident initiated petition to adjust fee hours on their block on Sundays, reducing the cost to the church of parking in the Courthouse Garage on Sundays, and providing a pay station on Church property to facilitate the payment process for parishioners.

Parking Occupancy Surveys - Staff completed parking occupancy surveys of blocks with and adjacent to the residential pay by phone program before and after implementation of the pilot. Surveys were conducted between April 2017 and October 2018 and included a range of days of the week and time of day. Overall, the surveys provide 105 observations of parking occupancy conditions on pay by phone blocks and 72 observations of parking occupancy conditions on adjacent blocks. At least two surveys were completed before and after signage was installed for

each block. See Attachment 3 for more details about when surveys were conducted. A summary of the results reflects that:

- On blocks where residential pay by phone was implemented:
 - The average parking occupancy decreased from 94% before residential pay by phone signage to 86% after.
 - The average percent of parkers from outside of the Residential Permit Parking (RPP) parking district decreased from 46% before signage to 30% after.
- On blocks adjacent to blocks with residential pay by phone:
 - The average parking occupancy increased from 85% occupancy before signage was installed on adjacent blocks to 88% after.
 - The average percent of parkers from outside of the RPP parking district decreased from 40% before signage on adjacent block to 37% after.

Parking Enforcement Feedback and Data - Parking enforcement staff communicated that enforcing parking restrictions on residential pay by phone blocks required similar effort and time to enforcing restrictions on the residential permit parking blocks. Parking enforcement officers give vehicles on these blocks about a 15-minute grace period to allow time for parkers to walk to a metered block and return with a receipt in case they choose that payment option, so the officers usually still check on vehicles twice, as they would on the time limited blocks.

However, parking enforcement also shared data on the number of parking citations given per month blocks with and without residential pay by phone between November 2017 and September 2018. The data showed that on average, twice as many citations were given on the blocks with residential pay by phone as those without.

Proposed Modifications to Pilot Program and Existing City Code:

Staff recommends the continuation of the program based on the generally positive feedback from residents and occupancy surveys showing that the program has achieved the program goals of making more parking available to residents on residential streets. Attachment 2 includes code language that recommends maintaining the existing petition and eligibility process for adding new blocks to the program. The community seemed to find the existing process acceptable, and this language would maintain a relatively consistent process with adding RPP restrictions to new blocks.

Staff proposes four modifications to the residential pay by phone program based on the evaluation and feedback on the program:

1. Staff proposes a modification to the Code to allow multiple adjacent blocks to apply simultaneously, so long as one of the blocks meets the location requirements. This will allow a block not adjacent to a metered block or an existing residential pay by phone block to be considered with a request for an adjacent, pay by phone eligible block.
2. Staff also recommends the expansion of the program to other areas adjacent to metered blocks throughout the City. Although the majority of respondents said they did not want the program expanded, based on the overall positive response to the program for residents in the pilot program area, staff believes that the program could be beneficial to other residential areas near commercial areas. The requirement to be near a metered area or an existing residential pay by phone block will limit eligibility. The Code would be modified to remove the pilot program boundaries.
3. Staff proposes a modification to the Code to clarify the signature requirement for an eligible block petition. The previous Code language, which is similar to the requirements outlined in other parts of the residential permit parking program, indicated that a petition must be signed by more than 50 percent of residents of a block. Because staff does not have a means to verify the number of individual residents living on a block, the proposed language states that the petitions must be signed by occupants of more than 50 percent of the residential properties abutting the block. This is consistent with how staff currently reviews petitions for both residential pay by phone requests and other requests for residential parking restrictions.
4. Finally, staff proposes a reference on how to remove parking restrictions as established in section 5-8-77(a). This makes it

clear that residents can petition for removal of the restrictions if they no longer feel they are appropriate for their block.

Other Proposed Changes in Response to Feedback:

Staff is taking into consideration other feedback received from the community and will continue to work towards making improvements to the residential permit parking and residential pay by phone programs including:

- Identifying opportunities to clarify the process for obtaining guest permits.
- Investigating how to streamline the guest permit process online or through ParkMobile.
- Identifying opportunities to improve wayfinding so that non-resident parkers are more aware of garage and metered parking options including Smart Mobility initiatives such as available space signage and online or app-based space reservations.
- Identifying additional opportunities for improvements through the RPP Refresh project such as considering options to allow modified hours when parking fees apply on certain blocks when deemed appropriate and recommended by the Traffic and Parking Board, in response to feedback about impacts of the residential pay by phone program on institutional uses such as churches.

Community Outreach Prior to Making a Recommendation:

Outreach to notify residents and business owners of the pilot program evaluation and to solicit feedback for the online feedback form included the following:

- Mailings to all residents in the pilot program area (343 residences - 111 on blocks with and 232 on blocks without residential pay by phone).
- Emails to the points of contacts for the 13 blocks with restrictions.
- Emails to Old Town Civic Association and other citizens who have provided input in the past.
- Emails to representatives from Old Town Boutique District, Old Town Business and Professional Association, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, and Visit Alexandria.
- Enews, Twitter, and Facebook.

A website was created with information on the pilot program and updates on the program evaluation and related public hearings. The Traffic and Parking Board received an overview of the pilot program evaluation at its meeting on November 26, 2018 and City Council received a similar overview on January 8, 2019. Feedback from these meetings was incorporated into the program modification considerations. Additionally, staff notified the Old Town Civic Association, West Old Town Citizens Association, and Upper King Street Neighborhood Association.

At the Traffic and Parking Board meeting on January 28, 2019, the Board held a public hearing on the proposed program modifications and associated City Code amendment. Four residents spoke in favor of the program, one spoke in opposition, two requested further information be gathered and communicated, and one requested continued discussion of solutions for St. Paul's Episcopal Church. The Board recommended that City Council approve the amendment to continue the residential pay by phone program with the proposed modifications.

FISCAL IMPACT: The cost to implement this ordinance is minor. There is a small cost of fabricating and installing the new signage for blocks added to the program. Each block requires approximately 6 to 8 signs at an overall cost of approximately \$600 to \$800 per block. Parking enforcement staff is currently enforcing parking restrictions on these blocks and no additional staff would be required to enforce the change to restrictions.

With regard to revenue generated by this ordinance, staff estimates continuation and expansion of the program could generate approximately \$120,000 a year from parking receipts. Based on the pilot program, an average of approximately \$8,200 in revenue is generated per block per year by fees paid by phone on blocks in the program. A small amount of additional revenue is likely being generated by people parking on blocks in the program and paying at meters on nearby blocks, but this revenue is difficult to quantify as it cannot be separated out from other revenue generated at nearby meters. If the program were continued and expanded to other areas, staff anticipates 15 additional blocks would petition in the next year. In addition, based on parking enforcement data, blocks with Residential Pay by Phone generate an average of about \$4,000 more in citations per block per year than those with just Residential Permit Parking restrictions.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Ordinance Cover

Attachment 2: Ordinance for Modifying the Residential Pay by Phone Program

Attachment 3: Parking Occupancy Survey Details

Attachment 4: St. Paul's Episcopal Church Parking Survey

Attachment 5: Presentation

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