City of Alexandria

301 King St., Room 2400
Alexandria, VA 22314

Legislation Text

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 6, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:
Introduction and First Reading. Consideration. Passage of an Ordinance to amend Section 5-8-84: Pay by Phone Parking Fee within a Residential Permit Parking District.

ISSUE: Consideration of an ordinance (Attachment 2) to amend Section 5-8-84 to continue and modify the pay by phone parking requirement as an option for residential parking restrictions.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council consider the proposed ordinance on first reading and set it for public hearing and final passage on March 16, 2019.

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 to allow paid parking on residential streets was implemented in November 2016. 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 City Council considered this ordinance at their first legislative meeting and public hearing meeting in February but due to an issue with publication of the ordinance, final action on the ordinance could not be taken. An emergency ordinance was approved to extend the pilot program until March 23, 2019, which allows for Council consideration at their meetings in March.

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. This information was discussed in February and a summary is provided in Attachment 3. Staff has continued to research alternative payment methods which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

DISCUSSION: If City Council chooses to modify, extend beyond March 23, 2019 and/or make the program permanent, the City Code will need to be amended. Attachment 2 includes draft language making the program permanent. Below is a summary of the proposed recommendations for continuation with modifications.

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

1. Allow authorized payment methods other than ParkMobile or a meter receipt on residential pay by phone blocks. This would allow payment by parking vouchers or other alternative methods if implemented by the City (discussed further below).
2. 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.
3. Removal of the pilot program boundary from the code to allow other areas near metered blocks to be eligible for the program. 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 adjacent to a metered block or an existing residential pay by phone block will limit eligibility.
4. 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 do 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.
5. Adding 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.

Additional Payment Options and Other Proposed Changes in Response to Feedback:
Based on feedback from City Council and the community, staff researched alternative payment options that could address concerns about users who do not have or do not want to use a cell phone for payment and/or have difficulty walking to a pay station on a nearby block to get a receipt. Staff identified two viable payment alternatives, described below.

1. *Pre-paid Parking Scratch-off Vouchers* - This method allows patrons planning to park on residential pay by phone blocks to purchase parking vouchers in advance at the same rate as meters ($1.75/hour) in pre-paid increments such as 2 hours. Patrons scratch off the time and date when they begin parking and place the voucher on their dashboard for parking enforcement to check. Parking vouchers could be sold at the Treasury window in City Hall, and other potential sale locations could be considered. This alternative payment method would be available to all users, and the proposed code amendment regarding "other authorized payment methods" would allow this method to be used.

2. *Senior Parking Permits for Use Only on Pay by Phone Blocks*- This method would allow senior residents in Alexandria over a certain age to apply to purchase an annual permit that would allow them to park only on Residential Pay by Phone blocks within the posted time limits without paying the hourly fees. While this is a legal option to pursue, this method would require further economic analysis into the appropriate up-front cost of a permit, eligible age and renewal options. Staff would also need to consider measures that would defend against abuse of a permit program, if adopted. Senior parking permits could be sold at the Treasury window in City Hall, and other potential sale locations or mail-in applications could be considered. An additional code section would be required to authorize this payment method.

Although staff heard strong feedback from residents that they did not want pay stations on residential blocks, installing meters on blocks in the program would also address concerns regarding difficulty with existing payment methods. City Council could also consider recommending one of the following:

1. Requiring meters to be installed near institutional or commercial uses on RPP streets approved for pay by phone restrictions, or
2. Requiring that additional meters need to be added as the program expands a certain distance from existing metered blocks, or
3. Providing a specific limit in the City Code on how far from an existing meter the program can expand (e.g. restrictions cannot be added on blocks more than 3 blocks from a metered block).

Staff is taking into consideration other feedback received from the community and will continue to use this feedback to identify opportunities in the residential permit parking and residential pay by phone programs including:

- Streamlining the guest permit process though virtual permits.
- Improving communications and awareness of parking programs and parking options
- Improving wayfinding so that non-resident parkers can find garage and metered parking options including Smart Mobility initiatives such as available space signage and online or app-based space reservations.
- Increasing the text size on program signage of the ParkMobile phone number and location of the nearest pay station.

Community Outreach:
Outreach to notify residents and business owners of the pilot program evaluation and to solicit feedback for the

online feedback form is summarized in Attachment 3. 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 unanimously recommended that City Council approve the amendment to continue the residential pay by phone program with the proposed modifications.

At the City Council meeting on February 23, 2019, a public hearing was held on the proposed program modifications and associated City Code amendment and 21 residents spoke on the program. Twelve residents spoke in favor of the program, four spoke in opposition, and five were neutral or voiced questions or concerns.

On March 4, 2019, staff attended the Commission on Aging Executive Committee meeting to present on the background, findings, and recommendations of the Residential Pay by Phone program and answer questions from the commission. The Commission had previously submitted a letter recommending the pilot program not be continued. At the meeting, the Commission members expressed some concerns for the program in general. Regarding the alternative payment options, they generally supported the concept of a senior permit and expressed concerns that the parking voucher may be too confusing to use.

Staff is also meeting with members of St. Paul's Church prior to the Council meeting to discuss the alternative payment options and receive feedback on whether these options help address some of their concerns.

FISCAL IMPACT: If adopted, implementation of Pay by Phone on 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 5 to 10 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: Program Evaluation
Attachment 4: Presentation

Attachment 5: Memo to City Council - Follow-up Q&A

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