

Proposed hike in Calgary parking fines unpopular

Aldermen fear wrath of voters

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 18, 2009



Commuters walk to their cars in a Calgary parking lot

Photograph by: Grant Black, Calgary Herald Archive

CALGARY - A proposed 50 per cent hike to parking fines could get a rough ride at a civic committee today, with some aldermen arguing Calgarians are already fed up with all things parking in the city.

"People have reached the boiling point, the tipping point, with the Calgary Parking Authority," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

In a report going to the land use, planning and transportation committee this morning, the parking authority is recommending boosting the cost of an over-time ticket from \$50 to \$75 over the next two years.

It would still be cheaper to pay early -- within 21 days--but not as cheap. It would rise from \$40 to \$45 next year, and to \$50 in 2011.

"I'm not on side with that," Ald. Andre Chabot said. "Considering that puts us the highest in the country."

The parking authority is also looking at charging for parking on Sundays and longer hours during the week.

However, there will also be a push to hold off on such initiatives until an operational review is completed.

The scope of that \$200,000 report will be discussed today.

"Until the comprehensive operational review is done, about how they're doing business, put a freeze on any of these new ideas they keep coming up with," Colley-Urquhart said.

Ald. Druh Farrell, who asked for the review, agrees that council has to get a clearer picture of how the parking authority is making decisions before proceeding.

"I don't think council has a desire to proceed with any of those changes, other than the reductions, until it sees the review," she said.

Farrell said the parking authority does need to move ahead with cuts to downtown and BRZ parking rates, which came into effect this week.

It lowered its on-street rates to encourage people to park for shorter periods of time, freeing up more spaces. It will now cost less for the first 30 to 60 minutes of parking, then the hourly rate will increase.

That move will result in a revenue drop for the parking authority of \$1.4 million and reduce the amount it contributes to the city to \$11.9 million from \$12.8 million.

However, an anticipated increase in the amount of money the parking authority collects through enforcement -- estimated in the budget to be \$2.2 million and which goes directly to city coffers-- will be used to address other revenue shortfalls the city is expecting.

Not approving the fine increases recommended by the parking authority would have an effect on the city's overall budget.

Ald. John Mar said he doesn't like the overtime parking fine increases, but some are OK, such as bigger fines for parking in front of a fire hydrant or blocking a driveway.

"It's a safety issue," he said.

The city does have to watch the difference between the cost of the ticket and the benefit of paying early, Ald. Bob Hawkesworth said.

According to the report, just over half of people who get a ticket pay within the less expensive three-week window, which results "in unnecessary administrative costs."

The parking authority announced its on-street rate reduction last week, but it also acknowledged it was investigating extending the hours it charges for parking. That could mean no more free parking on Sundays or holidays, or longer hours than the existing weekday and Saturday range of 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Many on council were not in favour of those changes.

According to 2010 budget adjustments released last week, extended hours would increase revenue by \$1.8 million.

Impound fees are also going up next year, to a maximum of \$16 a day, up from \$14. The first 12 hours of storage would still be free. Those changes would add \$700,000 in revenue.

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