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New car stalls a small win for all

By [LICIA CORBELLA](#), EDITOR

I asked all 14 Calgary city aldermen the same question yesterday. I also asked the mayor.

"Did you drive to work today?" was my simple question. Every single last one of them did. Ironic, to be sure, since yesterday was the day they discussed further limiting the number of parking spaces allowed to be built underneath new monstrous developments built downtown.

Some of them would blush and give explanations like Ward 11 Ald. Barry Erskine.

"We're going to be here until really late," he explained, "and I had stacks of reports to carry."

"You're not alone, Barry," I responded. "Many downtown workers start early and work late and carry lots of reports."

Others were unabashed. "I always drive," said the ever truthful and normally sensible Ward 1 Ald. Dale Hodges, who is in favour of limiting to utterly inadequate amounts the number of parking stalls built under new office towers. At least he's an honest and upfront hypocrite.

So, while our aldermen get to drive into their heated, underground reserved parking spot and ride an elevator into their place of work, some 43% of downtown workers make like sardines every morning riding on an overly crowded LRT car or on a jam-packed bus.

The LRT cars and the buses are too crowded because these same aldermen delayed buying said cars and buses for too long waiting for federal infrastructure dollars that never seemed to come.

Still, other downtown workers get to make like the aldermen -- usually the executives of large firms -- and others enter into the daily crapshoot of hoping they get a parking spot close enough to work and without too much hunting so they're still on time and their bosses don't yell at them.

These drivers are not necessarily wealthy either.

There's the single moms, such as Joy, who can't take transit because she has to pick up her two kids from two separate day cares -- both at different schools -- and taking transit made her late almost every afternoon, leaving her paying onerous late fees.

"It wasn't worth the stress for me or my kids," wrote Joy in her e-mail.

"But if the weather is cold, I sometimes have to park as much as seven blocks away from work because the prime lots all fill up early and fast."

Yesterday, aldermen debated expanding the parking plan called "cash-in-lieu" that forces high-rise developers downtown to build only half the normally allotted stalls for their tenant.

The developers then have to pay cash in lieu of these extra spaces to the city, which uses it to build public parkades, usually far from where they're needed and sometimes close to the direct competitor of the developer.

As a result, short-term parking spots are rare. That means couriers, photo copy repair, air conditioning repair, as well as visitors to our downtown are often left frustrated with some actually vowing not to do business in our downtown in the future.

But outrage by fed-up Calgarians reached the ears of our mayor, Dave Bronconnier, who came up with a compromise.

Allow developers to build 25% more parking stalls than the cash-in-lieu plan allows, as long as they identify those stalls as short stay (maximum four-hour) stalls. Ah, common sense.

Ward 13 Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, also called on establishing more incentives, for those people who car-pool.

"Some North American cities, including Minneapolis, have implemented incentives in some of their state-owned parking structures that include special discounted monthly parking passes and reduced hourly rates for registered car-pool vehicles," said Colley-Urquhart.

Clearly, that's something council should look at.

In the end, thanks to ordinary Calgarians flooding their aldermen with calls and stakeholders speaking up -- such as the Calgary Downtown Association and the Building Owners and Managers Association of Calgary -- sanity prevailed.

So take a bow all you commuting Calgarians who complained.

Last night's compromise will improve our downtown and it even made the aldermen's heated, underground parking stalls seem less hypocritical -- almost.