

Parking Meter Feedback...

In my former retail life I was known as a bit of a parking Nazi, but I haven't dwelled on the topic as a Main Street Executive Director prior to this point in time. Recently, the City Council of Emporia began the process of discussing changing the existing mechanical parking meters out and replacing them with electronic meters. Bellow we will talk about WHY the change is being suggested, ALTERNATIVES to the current suggestion and we will ask for FEEDBACK FROM YOU that we can pass along to commissioners. Plus, I would be remiss if I didn't include some information on WHY PARKING IS IMPORTANT.



Why is the city commission considering a switch to electronic parking meters?

For several reasons. Primarily, the mechanical meters are breaking down and the city can't find parts for them. Secondly, the existing meters make it difficult to increase fees associated with the meters, and as time goes on the meters lose their deterrent effect intended to facilitate traffic turnover and they become less cost effective to maintain and/or collect from. Finally, electronic meters typically give a city flexibility in changing rates and types of payments allowed by meter collection. More and more people are not carrying cash these days, and some electronic meters can facilitate a transaction without the traditional use of cash or coin. For some cities, flexibility in rate changes can allow for different pricing schedules depending on use.

Alternatives to the current proposal-Alternatives are really infinite, but we have to realize that the city must have sources of revenue and it is important from the city and consumers perspective that parking "turns over" and is available for customers of businesses. The status quo isn't really an alternative, because the meters are falling into disrepair, but there are some other viable alternatives that facilitate the spirit of the program.

1. First, technology exists that allows people to "virtually" mark vehicles by collecting license plate data. The data can be used in parking zones, which would negate an individuals ability to avoid a ticket by moving their car or wiping off a chalk mark. Because the data is individualized, a "stair step" approach can be instituted that avoids fines for most customers but eventually tickets chronic parking violators at an increasing fine level. The up front costs of this type of system are extensive, but there are grants that can help off-set the expenditure. In this scenario, some parking meters could conceivably be removed and replaced with spot enforcement. The parts could then be used to extend the life of existing meters in other locations.
2. Replace some meters now with electronic versions in high offense areas and utilize the parts on the "replaced" meters to extend the life of existing parking meters. This compromise position would be less expensive than a complete transition, but it would also simply delay the inevitable replacement of all mechanical parking meters.
3. *This option was proposed by a business:* Just remove the meters. Their feeling was that meters were ineffective and did not help businesses. I don't believe that this is a viable option from the city's perspective because the meters do provide some income and some deterrence, but I will include this option simply because it was proposed by a member.

We need your feedback!- I have received some communications from member businesses about this parking meter proposal. The city asked me to pass the information on to them, but I want to give businesses the chance to forward well thought out, respectful responses to the proposal. Random name calling may work on a blog, but if this is something that you care about I would ask that you keep responses on a professional level in order that I can more effectively address your concerns with officials. [Attached is a survey that will allow you to vote on the Parking Meter Issue \(CLICK HERE\) and](#)

[we will make the results available to city officials.](#) You can also e-mail a response to Emporia Main Street at main.street@emporia-kansas.gov and we will pass your responses along to the appropriate channels.

Why parking is important- If you or your staff are parking in front of your business or your neighbor's businesses, you are losing money. It's that simple. You might as well walk in and take money out of your safe, register or cash bag every day that you violate the spirit of timed parking. We are visual people. We like to park where we can see our favorite store front. A customer in a downtown area is willing to walk less than 75 feet to a front door, and nothing you do will change a customer's desire for close (*in visual range*) parking.

On Thursday morning, I had an owner of multiple properties tell me he is adding a parking clause to tenant contracts because he understands the importance of available parking to the success of his tenant businesses. All of us are busy. All of us have errands to run and things to do, but no business should consistently put their needs above those of their customers (*parking is a customer need*). In difficult economic times, you can support your business and the businesses around you simply by not taking customer parking.

Simply put, if you aren't willing to walk a little extra and you're getting PAID to show up at a location, what makes you think customers will walk a little extra when they have to PAY YOU? This is especially true in cold weather (like now).

The vast majority of our Main Street members are smaller businesses, and their strength lies in their adaptability. Your ideas, creativity and motivation are a tremendous asset IF you can take your plans and make them a reality. Make a short list of some things you would like to do to improve your business, and then get them done! Play to your strengths, and realize that you have an organization in Emporia Main Street willing to help your business succeed.

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