

Public Responses to the BPA Parking Fee Proposal: Part 3 (13)

Ed Gallagher, The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Parking, Serious Issues September 24, 2018

(13th in a series of posts on parking)

Bill Scheirer and Page Van Wirt

The Gadfly will divide the responses from the public to the BPA proposal to raise parking meter rates into several posts for sharper focus, and at the end he will summarize the key points and identify the options offered to the \$1.50/hr. meter rate. The Gadfly's notes on each respondent are given below, but you are encouraged to watch the videos and to take your own notes.

6) Bill Scheirer

video 5: 1:30-9:40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLShFEbK4uE>

Is there a recent copy of the Desman report? [*Answer: "can't say with certainty."*]

When available at \$.20/page, it will be expensive to copy.

Funds are needed to pay for the current New Street garage and upcoming repairs to the Walnut Street garage.

The current fines are too low and therefore not a disincentive to park on the street.

The meters have the capability of "dynamic pricing" – can be changed by area and by time of day — this should be seriously considered.

What are the “industry standards,” and how do they apply to Bethlehem?
[Answer: *general practices, not a blanket policy, tailored to specific place.*]

Industry standards: “smacks of speaking ex cathedra.”

Often overlooked is the danger of setting rates so high that people don’t come.

The suggested raise might seem minimal, but there are some people who are on the cusp, and an increase might affect them, a raise might tilt them in favor of the Mall.

7) Paige Van Wirt (see post 4 as well)

video 5: 9:40-12

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLShFEbK4uE>

video 6: 0-10:20

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooGL7g-f8Mo>

1) Our parking garage rates are 1/2 of other cities: \$65/mo v. \$118/mo. Why not raise rates for larger users (St. Luke’s, Lehigh), who we are basically subsidizing? [Answer: *have recommended re-evaluating these rates on a more regular basis.*]

We are “subsidizing larger people who asked for this garage to be built on the backs of the small businesses who are trying to attract people downtown. I think that [change] should be an enormous part of how we generate revenues.”

Look closely at who is using the garages. Why are we not asking them to pay their fair share “instead of putting it on the backs of people who live in the city?”

Re-evaluation of garage rates should be done now and part of this recommendation.

There are “more equitable sources of revenue for what we are trying to do, which is build another parking garage for a few users. I think that the people who are going to be using the garages, the larger businesses, really need to have some skin in the game. The first step is to have them pay the market value for what they’re using.”

2) We have variable rate meters: “Why are you not recommending that as an efficiency in the system?” [*Answer: parts of southside and northside would be further penalized, would be a perception of penalizing users and defeating what we are trying to accomplish. There is not enough disparity of demand.*]

Under this plan the few streets with over 80% occupancy rates would have higher rates, but majority of the streets would have lower rates.

*Target % occupancy rather than flat rate.

Suspicious that drop in revenue is the reason for not going with this option.

Variable pricing: “This is how all efficient cities nowadays price their parking, on occupancy levels not on flat fees.”

If we increase fee of fines, it would offset decrease in meter revenue.

“We need to stop putting up impediments to drawing people downtown.”

“Most of the places where we have parking are underutilized, and therefore we should be dropping the rates to encourage the target occupancy rates.”

There’s a “lot better ways to find money for this parking system than putting it on the backs of the small businesses and the people who use the downtowns the most.”

Liked the idea of free parking.

Need to “take longer looks at what we are trying to accomplish here.”

Should give 2 hrs of free parking in garages to transient parkers.

“Is there any of the BPA board here tonight.” [*No.*] “I’m kinda shocked at that. . . . I’m surprised they don’t want to hear what we have to say.”

Meetings should be after 5 and in City Hall not in the garage.

“The purpose of this public meeting, it’s not just perfunctory, it’s not just we can sit here and see what you have recommended and we have to go home and say well that’s how it’s going to be. I hope the purpose of this public meeting is to legitimately hear alternative ideas, alternative propositions because I think as you’ve heard here . . . there’s a lot of real concern about how this meter rate increase is going to impact our small business and the economic viability of our downtown. So I urge you to please keep an open mind, please consider some of the ideas that you’ve heard here tonight.”