

Wanted: people with math skills to think about the BPA proposal to increase parking fines

The Bethlehem Gadfly Parking, Serious Issues September 30, 2019

(123rd in a series of posts on parking)

So Council is going to consider two topics from the Bethlehem Parking Authority tomorrow:

- 1) increasing the parking fine structure
- 2) adopting variable rate pricing

Let's take them one at a time, the fine issue first.

Here's the proposal *cum* rationale prepared by the Desman BPA consultant for increasing the fines:

Fine Recommendation Memo 8.20.19

To keep it simple, let's use this one specific example. Meter parking is now \$1.50/hr. The fine for a violation is now \$10. If you work an 8hr. day in downtown Northside and want to "squat" in a valuable space, instead of feeding the meter \$12, you can not feed the meter and pay a fine of only \$10. The new proposal would raise the fine to \$15. And if you want just to park for a short time to do some quick shopping but let the meter run out, then you would pay \$15 instead of the current \$10, a 50% increase.

Here are the main points of the Desman/BPA proposal for the increases.

Background:

- “Parking citations and fines are a method to make parking as equitable as possible for those that following the parking regulations and those that do not.”
- “The purpose of this memo is to review and evaluate the City of Bethlehem’s parking violation fines in comparison to peer cities.”
- “Parking industry standards suggest that the fine for non-payment of a parking meter or other parking meter violations be priced at least 10- 15 times the hourly parking rate.”

Rationale:

- “The current fine schedule is not penal enough to encourage motorists to simply pay for parking instead of breaking the law [because] the number of parking violation tickets issued over the past five years has increased by more than 300% by the end of 2018.” [Breaking the rules is now not being deterred.]
- “In Bethlehem, the fine for parking at an expired meter and the fine for parking in excess of the posted time limit in non- metered spaces (such as in residential permit parking areas) is less than half of the average of the cities examined.” [Raising our fines would not be excessive.]
- “These increases will bring the fine amounts for parking meter violations in Bethlehem closer to those of the peer cities examined.” [We would no longer be an outlier on the lower end.]

- “The Authority is responsible to provide reliable services to the general public on a continuous basis and shall be financed by costs recovered primarily through user charges. As such, the Authority has the fiduciary responsibility to ensure its properties are properly maintained to generate necessary user fees to cover operational costs and debt service.” [The BPA has a responsibility to raise its operating expenses.]

Financial impact:

- “This could result in \$75,000- \$100,000 annually, roughly a 2- 3% increase, in additional parking meter revenue.”

Things to consider:

- The goal in all this should be to help the resident as much as possible (cost-wise as well as quality-of-service-wise) while, of course, maintaining the fiscal stability of the BPA.
- *Does BPA need the \$75,000- \$100,000 annual revenue increase?* In the draft “pro forma” presented to Council on July 2, the BPA says it doesn’t need the increase in fines to finance the Polk Street Garage. It has enough revenue just with the meter increase.
- *Does BPA need the \$75,000- \$100,000 annual revenue increase?* The BPA just gained \$200,000 by choosing what some (many?) people thought was a less desirable bid for the retail/residential aspect of Polk Street.
- *In fact, no,* BPA does not make its case in its own proposal on the need for money: the purpose of the Desman study is

focused on comparison with peer cities, with whom we are out of step.

- So, if BPA doesn't need the money, why should we care that our rates are low — since low rates are a good thing for our residents?
- *In fact, no*, the point BPA prioritizes is the lack of penal power in the fine structure, which may be fostering an injustice against those who follow the law and which may be adversely affecting the circulation of available parking spaces.
- So, as has been suggested here in these pages by [Dana Grubb](#), is there a way to re-vision the mix of meter rates and fines to put the onus on the violators through even heavier fines, while easing the recent meter increase on the law-abiding residents?
- Or is that a bridge too far?

What would it take to reduce meter rates?

Gadfly — whose claim to specialized knowledge ends at the fact that he knows 9 uses of the comma — is way out over his ski's here.

But here goes . . . humbly.

Desman says that raising the fines “could result in **\$75,000-\$100,000** annually, roughly a 2- 3% increase, in additional parking meter revenue.”

The “[pro forma](#)” BPA presented at the July 2 Council meeting — IF GADFLY IS READING IT CORRECTLY — has a different figure: **\$292,378**.

See line 30, page 3:

\$2,268,925: 2019 projected meter revenue @ \$1.50/hr.

\$1,976,547: 2018 (presumably) actual meter revenue @ \$1.00/hr.

\$292,378: increase as a result of raise in meter rate from \$1.00 to \$1.50

So, if in the pro forma financial scenario the meter rate is roll-backed to \$1.00/hr., how much would the fines have to be increased to bring in \$292,378 and break even?

Of course, if we take Desman's figure of a \$75,000- \$100,000 annual increase, the amount of the fine increase would be even less.

So, in the Desman financial scenario, if the meter rate is roll-backed to \$1.00/hr., how much would the fines have to be increased to bring in \$75,000-100,000 and break even?

Is Gadfly making sense? Is he thinking logically? Math people, speak up! EEL, are you out there?

Is anybody still awake?

Herewith find Gadfly trying, trying to open up some options to the BPA proposal that might help residents . . . trying valiantly.

Gadfly just cannot see raising the rate just to get in step with our peers, which seems a kind of never-ending cycle, nor can he see why if the main reason for the increase is violators, others are swept in.

But he admits budgets and statistics and math mystify him, and he waits for a well-deserved slap upside the head.

And this took more time than the lunch hour, dammit, and he just missed yoga.

Namaste

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