

Date: July 29th, 2010
To: Cambridge City Council Members
From: Livable Streets Alliance
Re: Sustainable Parking Policy

Dear Honorable City Council Members,

You will soon vote on whether to raise the residential parking permit fees from \$8 to \$20 in 2011 and to \$25 in 2013. This would be the first increase since 1992. Raising the residential parking fee the relatively small amount being proposed will raise about \$480,000 a year, helping the city during these tight fiscal times.

However, we believe that it would be better to re-examine the permit fee in the context of overall parking management policies. We believe that a better coordinated set of policies – including a better structured parking fee system, would not only raise revenue but could also help achieve city goals for livability, economic development, environmental protection, reduction of green house gas emissions, public health, and transportation efficiency.

Parking is a scarce and valuable resource in the city of Cambridge. It is one of the largest uses of public land. Even so, in many parts of Cambridge, drivers often circle the block looking for an open space -- wasting time, spewing pollution, and causing tension among neighbors and visitors to our City. Current residents often demand that developers be required to provide large amounts of off-street parking, raising the cost of housing commercial rents while ironically ending up putting more cars on city streets.

Parking is also problematic because its low price makes it easier, and therefore more likely, that people will hop in their car leading to increased congestion, more polluting emissions, less physical activity, less safety on the streets – and more contention for the available parking.

We believe that residents who truly need a parking space should have one, but the overall goal should be to have fewer cars on our streets. We believe that business district parking meter fees should better reflect the market rate of parking in a particular area, with continued exemption for disabled drivers, and with all revenues ear-marked for area improvements. We believe that the city should encourage developers to build less, not more, off street parking.

As for the residential parking permit fee, we believe the new fee proposal of \$20/\$25 per year is too low and too simplistic. At \$8 per year, residents pay 2.1 cents per day for their permits. Even at \$20 it's less than 5 cents per day. We are giving away enormous amounts of public land almost for free for a single, very problematic private use.

Instead, we believe that parking permit fees should be structured to reward people who have fewer, less polluting, and smaller cars – or none at all. Such a progressive fee structure might be:

- \$50 for the first vehicle, \$150 for the 2nd vehicle, and so on. This measure alone would encourage many to park in their driveways, immediately reducing on street demand.
- A parking surcharge for neighborhoods with particularly high parking demand to further encourage better use of the road-space.
- Offer free or reduce parking charges for low income residents who demonstrate a unique and pressing need to own a car.

It is very important to be specific about what will be done with the revenue produced by the higher permit fees – no matter how they are structured. We suggest that the money be used to make it easier for Cambridge residents to go car-lite or even entirely car-free.

- Increase the city's snow removal equipment or contracts to improve clearance of sidewalks, bus stops, and bike lanes;
- Expand the city budget for streetscape improvements including: better sidewalks & street trees, more visible bike lanes & cycle tracks, more timely pothole fixes and re-timing traffic lights;
- Annually, install a few thousand bicycle racks;
- Provide additional subsidies for low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled who need to use taxi services;
- Use some of the money to conduct experiments on what works to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled and car ownership in our city. For example, annually, purchase a new bicycle for every 15-year-old in the city.

We realize that times are hard and no one likes to pay more for something they already get almost for free. We also realize that parking permits are only the tip of the iceberg on making our city more livable. But raising the current very low price of a parking permit is a start.

Best Regards,

Mark Chase
Parking Policy Advisor
Livable Streets Alliance

Charlie Denison
Advocacy Director
LivableStreets Alliance

Additional notes for review by Council

Managing Resident Permit Parking

Proposed Goals

Cambridge should use the residential parking permit program to accomplish the following goals:

1. **Discourage spillover** parking from commuters (e.g. business owners and employees) and non-commuters (e.g. visitors and shoppers) into residential areas.
2. **Manage demand for the existing parking supply** to maintain a specific target level of parking availability day and night in residential areas. By creating the right level of parking availability, parking will become easier and more convenient. Parking should be easier to find and convenient to use, especially for high-priority vehicle trips. The right price for a permit should ensure that roughly 15% of parking (1 in 7 spaces) are free at peak parking times. Resident permits should not just be a “license to hunt” but a strong assurance that a parking space will be available when needed.
3. **Reduced need for enforcement** in residential neighborhoods to increase compliance with parking rules. More parking availability means that fewer drivers will be tempted to park illegally in bus zones, on sidewalks, or in front of fire hydrants and driveways.
4. **Parking funds for community improvements--** A good RPP system gives something back to the residents and gives them a say in how the fee money is spent. It also makes it easier to find parking on their street.
5. **Encourage travel by public transit and alternatives to the private car.** More parking availability improves transit speed and reliability by reducing double-parking, which means the MBTA and private bus operators will be able to operate faster, safer and more reliably, especially on busy commercial corridors where many primary routes operate.
6. **Reduce conflict** between residential and business parking needs. Improving access to commercial areas, whether by foot, bicycle, transit, or car (through the right level of parking availability), will facilitate economic activity in Cambridge’s neighborhood commercial districts while increasing the city’s economic vitality and competitiveness.
7. **Reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.** More parking availability means that drivers will spend less time circling in search of parking spaces. Less circling will reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, and improve the quality of life in Cambridge neighborhoods.
8. **Improve safety for all road users.** The right level of parking availability reduces double-parking and circling, both of which present hazards for all roadway users, including pedestrians, bicyclists and other drivers.

Managing Parking for Availability

There are two basic ways to manage a limited resource such as on-street parking space: through **market mechanisms** such as setting an appropriate price for parking, or by **rationing**. Cambridge uses a crude combination of pricing and rationing that does not work well to manage parking in the City. Permits are rationed by making them only available for \$8 to Cambridge residents. However, an \$8 fee is so much lower than meter or private parking rates that it does not function as an effective parking management mechanism in the City.

We face many challenges that are related to over-use of the automobile. Globally cars are a major contributor to climate change. At the City level traffic chokes major transportation arteries slowing down public transit and creating noise and air pollution. At the neighborhood level, parking shortages create

anxiety among neighbors who resent new-comers who may bring cars with them to the neighborhood. At the individual level cars contribute to sedentary life-style that has created an obesity epidemic in the United States. Effective parking management will be an important first step to resolve these issues.

Effective parking management can reduce parking problems, support innovative transportation initiatives, and improve neighborhood livability.

Using the Price of Parking to Reduce Parking Problems

Nothing motivates people better than simple market mechanisms. Currently many drivers in Cambridge are frustrated at the time-consuming chore of finding a parking space. Furthermore, once a driver finds a parking space, the person will be less inclined to move their car because they fear being unable to find a parking space upon their return. Studies of parking turnover after snow storms finds that between ten and thirty percent of cars are not cleared off one week after a snow storm. In other words many people are storing cars long term on street. Low parking permit fees encourage long term storage of vehicles.

Charge more for parking and many will decide to forgo car ownership and use the T and car-sharing to get around, freeing up parking for those who really need the space.

Lower income car-dependant households can benefit from a simple affordable-parking program can be set up to accommodate their parking & driving needs. Increased revenues from permits could fund this program.

Parking Revenue to Support Innovative Transportation Solutions & Neighborhood Livability

Fortunately, for each dollar of increased permit revenue, \$40,000 revenue is generated. Beyond the benefit of fewer cars parked on City streets, these funds can be used to support transportation solutions that will increase neighborhood livability and further reduce the need for car ownership.

Better transportation services will induce more people to give up their cars resulting in the price of parking going down over time. Thus a cycle of virtue will develop where parking generates revenues that make the city more sustainable reducing the need to drive and reducing parking rates long term. Imagine a City where we can remove parking because the demand is not there to support it! This should be a long term goal of effective parking policy.

Effective on-street parking management supports unbundled parking

Most of today's housing bundles the price of parking with housing which means that any interested buyer or renter pays a price for parking that is inseparable from the overall price of the housing. Housing options for low- and moderate-income people are increasingly limited, because bundled parking forces all buyers and renters to pay for a parking space, whether or not they use it.

Unbundling parking simply separates the cost of parking from the cost of housing. If you don't use the parking space you don't pay for it. When on-street parking is set artificially low (below off-street rates) unbundling parking will simply "drive" a car owner to get a permit over paying the separate parking cost. Raising the cost of the sticker will pave the way to support unbundled parking, and therefore bring housing costs down for people who do not own a car.

Street space shouldn't be sold cheaply for car storage. According to the 2000 Census, nearly 30% of Cambridge households do not own a car, yet they do not benefit from the huge amount of city space dedicated to resident car parking.