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EDITOR'S PICK

Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership worries increase in parking prices will hurt businesses

Wes Young

Sep 19, 2024

A downtown parking plan that replaces quarters in meters with a smartphone app drew positive comments about modernization but also concerns about the steep increase in the cost of on-street parking, as Winston-Salem officials held the first of two meetings intended to gauge public response to the plan.

Turnout was light for the city's public meeting at the Kaleideum on Wednesday, but another meeting takes place Monday that will be held from 5-7:30 p.m. at Benton Convention Center on Fifth Street.

People who now use parking meters pay 25 cents for either a half hour or an hour of parking, depending on the location.

Users would be charged \$1.50 per hour for all on-street parking spaces if the Winston-Salem City Council approves the plan.



Alex Stone (left), a transportation engineer for the city, explains to Heidi Schwartz, director of hospitality at Foothills Brewing, the specifics behind the app that will be used for parking in downtown Winston-Salem. The meeting, held at Kaleideum, is the first of two meetings on downtown parking changes.

Allison Lee Isley, Journal

Time limits on how long someone can park will remain as they are now, but none of the time-limit spaces will be free of charge, as many are now.

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The city would still allow free on-street parking after 5 p.m. on weekdays and at all times on weekends.

The city would contract with a private company, PayByPhone, which has an app people could use to pay for parking.



Dan Coughlin (gesturing with hands) poses questions about downtown parking to Reid Hutchins (standing from left), transportation operations manager; Jeff Fansler, director of transportation; Bobby Croom, assistant director of transportation; and Alex Stone, transportation engineer.

Allison Lee Isley photos, Journal

Artie Sparrow, one of those who came to Wednesday’s meeting, said he won’t personally be impacted badly by the new charges, but worries about their effort on people who work downtown — the people who bus the tables, sweep the floors and wash the dishes in downtown businesses.

With what they make, he said, “there’s not enough wiggle room to suddenly have that much more expense.

“I can see how it can change the lives of people who can’t come to a meeting in the middle of the day.”

Heidi Schwartz, who chairs the board of the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, said the group representing downtown businesses is in favor of modernization downtown, but that members are “nervous about the impact of the rates going from 25 cents to \$1.50.”

Business owners want to make it easy for people “wanting to come into our restaurants and our bars, to walk on our streets, to visit our art galleries and music venues,” she said. “We want to make sure that we are providing reasonable alternatives for our guests to our city and to our business owners and to the employees. We want to ... showcase our city and not feel like we are charging people to do so.”



Artie Sparrow listens as Reid Hutchins (left), transportation operations manager, answers a question during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to changes to downtown parking.

Allison Lee Isley, Journal

The new phone app would handle parking in city-owned garages as well as on the street. The hourly charge for a garage spot would remain at \$1, the lower amount than on-street parking meant to encourage more people to use the garages.

Under the plan, the parking enforcement vehicles and city garages would be equipped with license plate readers to handle enforcement, with people getting parking tickets in the mail for overstaying or not paying. The cost of a parking ticket would rise from \$15 to \$30.



Transportation officials wait to greet people during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to changes to downtown parking on Wednesday.

Allison Lee Isley, Journal

Council Member Jeff MacIntosh, who chairs the Public Works Committee of the Winston-Salem City Council, said people don't like change, but the city is trying to make parking "logical," so people "know what they're going to pay."

The city currently subsidizes its parking program from the general fund, but officials hope to have the parking program pay for itself under the new plan. The plan must yet pass muster with the full city council, and would go into effect sometime in the spring if approved.

Rebecca Silberman, the director of operations at Sawtooth School for Visual Art, said she thinks the standardization of the parking experience will be a good thing, “as long as communication is clear and as widespread as it can be.”

Kevin Bowers, who serves as the downtown community liaison for the Winston-Salem Police Department, said that officers on the downtown patrol know well the troubles caused by the current system and its breakdowns.

They watch as visitors struggle with broken meters, then drive off in frustration when they give up. James Douglas, owner of the Silver Moon Saloon, a Trade Street bar, said that the parking plan should work out OK as long as it doesn’t charge the high rates that some of the private lots are charging. And keep night parking free, he added.

Schwartz said the city might have a better reaction to the plan if it phased in the charge over some years.

“I do think that maybe slowing down the jump from 25 cents to a \$1.50 would be something I would ask the council to consider as we move forward,” she said. “Maybe increase a quarter a year or whatever makes sense to get to the end goal instead of trying to catch up so quickly all at once.”

PHOTOS: Winston-Salem officials hold the first of two public meetings to gauge response to downtown parking plan



Reid Hutchins (left), transportation operations manager for the city, speaks with Kevin Bowers, downtown community liaison for the Winston-Salem Police Department's downtown bike patrol, during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Dan Coughlin (center) speaks with Jeff Fansler (left), director of transportation, and Bobby Croom, assistant director of transportation, during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Jeff Fansler (from left), director of transportation, listens as Dan Coughlin poses questions to Fansler, Reid Hutchins, transportation operations manager, Bobby Croom, assistant director of transportation, and Alex Stone, transportation engineer, during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Dan Coughlin (center) poses questions to Reid Hutchins (from left), transportation operations manager, Jeff Fansler, director of transportation, Bobby Croom, assistant director of transportation, and Alex Stone, transportation engineer, during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Reid Hutchins (left), transportation operations manager, speaks with Artie Sparrow during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Artie Sparrow listens as Reid Hutchins (left), transportation operations manager, answers a question during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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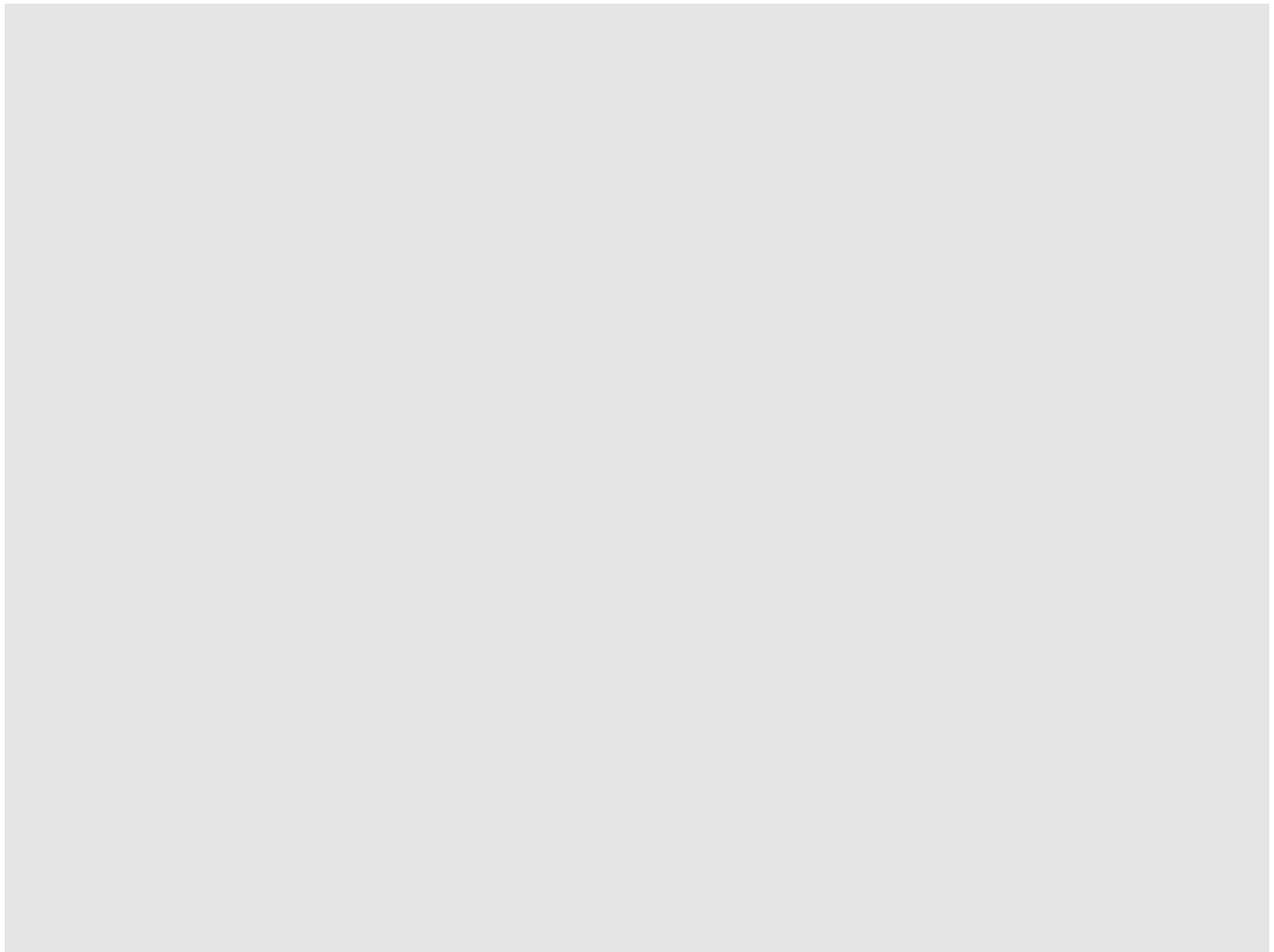
Heidi Schwartz (left), director of hospitality at Foothills Brewing, speaks with Alex Stone, a transportation engineer for the city, during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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Alex Stone, a transportation engineer for the city, explains to Heidi Schwartz (left), director of hospitality at Foothills Brewing, the specifics behind the application that will be used for parking during the first of two public meetings held by the city to gauge community response to the upcoming downtown parking changes on Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2024, at Kaleideum in downtown Winston-Salem, N.C. The second meeting will be held Monday, Sept. 23, from 5 until 7 p.m. at the Benton Convention Center.

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