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Item 22-1576: Resolution 12-R-22 Elimination of Council Parking Passes

Common Council

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Mayor Jake Woodford 41:58

We'll move on next [...] item from finance. Item 22-1576 Resolution 12-R-22 elimination of council parking passes. As a reminder, this comes to the council from Finance Committee with recommendation for denial. We have a motion and a second to approve. This would approve the denial. Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 42:31

Thank you chair. I would like to urge my colleagues to think further about this. I understand that many of you are tired of thinking about this, but I can't get past the sticking point of needlessly asking taxpayers to pay more than is truly necessary for us to be able to do our job.

We've been told—the authors of this resolution have been told that we are playing political theater and that this is virtue signaling. And I beg you to think otherwise, because this is directly telling our taxpayers that we are more important than they are and that it's more important for us to have a benefit that is more than what is necessary for parking. I have so much more to say but I'm not going to at this time. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:37

Alder Firkus.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 43:40

Thank you. Can I make a motion to make this vote Not Withstanding?

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:49

Okay, we can just handle that by request.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 43:51

All right, it's just request. Okay. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:52

Thank you. Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 44:00

Thank you. Let's start I guess just by going over a couple of the basics, because we've had a lot of discussion about this, and I've heard a number of different comments over the numerous discussions. So just to make sure everyone's on the same page.

This resolution is a budget amendment. And we have budget amendments that come up throughout the year. It's not unique. It's not unprecedented. It happens. So just for starters there.

This proposal removes the parking pass benefit for council members only in 2023. It can't, we can't, by taking it out of the budget for 2023 make this a permanent move. Can't prevent future discussion about parking passes in the future.

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Taking these dollars from the general fund and allocating them for council parking passes, takes \$7,200 that in my mind, could literally be spent 1000s of other ways and impact far more people in our city of 75,000 than the 15 people who sit in these chairs as Council members. In fact, I would bet if this resolution was over something else that talked about cutting \$7,200, this wouldn't face nearly the opposition that it has. And we should ask ourselves why that is because when it comes down to it, all this money does is benefit 15 people out of 75,000.

The past attempts that we've made to modify this in some way to allow some sort of paid benefit for council members to park—forget about all those things. That's not what this this resolution is. This is just to completely do away with this this benefit altogether. I appreciate that several of my colleagues have worked in past meetings to try and come up with different ways to have some sort of benefit for various reasons. We've realized that those are too difficult to accomplish or just don't make sense for whatever reason. But now we're at the point of just completely eliminating this altogether.

I went back over past discussions of this, just to kind of re listen to some of the things that were said, and just want to kind of clear up some of that as we think about this tonight. So one of the things that was said was if we get rid of parking passes, it needs to be replaced with something else. And I would ask us to think about why. Why do we need to replace it with something else? We—most of this council voted for an 8% pay raise for council members for next year. Why do we need more than that? Why do we need something to replace a benefit that we shouldn't necessarily need to begin with?

Another statement that was made was the amount of money for parking passes doesn't take money from something else. I think this shows a complete lack of understanding of finances.

This amount of money is not worth arguing over was another statement that was made. I'd remind our colleagues during budget Saturday directors sat in the tables back here and talked about how they tried to find ways to cut \$250 from their budget. So in my mind, \$7,200 is absolutely worth arguing over.

Another statement that was made, some employees who have a parking pass don't use them every day. We're not employees full time or part time. We don't have oversight of those employees. I don't think that's even an argument that that holds weight to compare us to them or how much they use the benefit.

This resolution and past discussions of taking away Council parking passes, as was noted, is political theater. Boy the number of times we talked had political theater enter this room that has nothing to do with city business, I couldn't even count all of those.

Another statement removing this means only a certain class of people run for council. Do we really think anyone runs for council because we get a parking pass? I bet none of us who ran for council knew at the time we were running that you got a parking pass.

This doesn't penalize taxpayers. I would argue that it absolutely does when we're using it to benefit 15 people rather than 75,000.

Parking passes enable people to be here on time was another statement. What allows us to be here on time is leaving early, not having a parking pass.

The parking ramp ensures a close parking spot. There are dozens of parking spots that are closer than the parking ramp guys. The parking ramp ensures there's a spot for us to park period. There are dozens of parking stalls all around the city center and other parking lots that are even closer.

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A few others that I don't even know how to respond to. This amount—it doesn't provide a tangible benefit to anyone else in the community. This doesn't fix anything. The amount of money is hard to make a difference with. Parking passes provide equity for council members. Honestly, if we don't value a parking pass enough to buy one for ourselves, why do we expect the city to pay for one for us? We should really be asking ourselves the question of why should we ask the city to spend almost \$500 a year for each of us to have this pass when we can pay less than \$2 out of our own pockets a month to pay for parking? That's closer.

If we choose not to support this amendment, in my mind, we're telling the community that we feel we're entitled to this benefit. Opposing this resolution isn't about fairness or equity or certainly not about fiscal responsibility. It's entitlement, and it's nothing more. And I think it's time for us to do the right thing. Remove this wasteful spending from the budget guys. We just minutes ago voted to lower another city budget for a reason that I would argue is a fair reason to do so. So if moving this \$7,200 to the concrete budget, to address one of our biggest needs for the city isn't something that's palatable to you, we just gave ourselves another place to put that money tonight. So I urge you to support this resolution and be done with this. Thank you

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 50:08

Thank you chair. I have a question for the Municipal Services director. And that is how many concrete sidewalk blocks does 72,000—er does that money buy us?

Mayor Jake Woodford 50:26

Director Block how many sections?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 50:31

Thank you chair. I believe it was approximately five to 10 concrete blocks.

Mayor Jake Woodford 50:45

Alder Firkus.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 50:47

Thank you chair. I would like to offer an amendment. The amendment would strike the existing language in the "therefore be it resolved" statement and add in the language "Any money used for 2023 parking permits from alders who choose not to take a parking pass from 2023 be added to the police department's budget to aid officers in assisting homeless persons with the challenges caused by winter weather and related community safety expenses. The amount to be transferred will equal the full 12 month cost of parking passes for any even number district alder person, or any odd number alder district alderperson if that person is running for reelection unopposed, plus the cost of four months of parking passes for any other alder who chooses not to accept a parking pass in 2023. The funds will be made available to the police department after the first week of January, excuse me, January 2023."

Mayor Jake Woodford 51:50

Okay, we have a motion and a second to amend.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 51:56

Yes, I did email since I was a little wordy.

Mayor Jake Woodford 51:59

Okay.

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Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 51:59

Sorry, I was gonna print out a copy of this. But my printer was not working.

Mayor Jake Woodford 52:03

Okay. Okay. We have a motion of a second. We'll restart the queue. All right. Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 52:21

Thank you chair. The name of the resolution is to eliminate—elimination of parking passes, I urge you to please defeat this amendment.

Mayor Jake Woodford 52:33

Alder Croatt?

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:36

Thank you, Mayor. I appreciate the amendment. Could we get some clarification. Did the amendment state those turning in passes was that the first part of the amendment?

Mayor Jake Woodford 52:49

Alder Firkus.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 52:51

Could just reread the first part of it.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 52:52

Yeah, so anyone who says who declines to take a parking pass in 2023, that's where the money would come from, from people who choose not to take a pass. So I know it's kind of a little bit convoluted with differentiating between even and odd and if you're unopposed. Just I want to avoid where any of us would be making decisions for someone—on someone else's behalf. And with elections coming up any of us that are being either aren't running again or are running but are challenged, would be making a decision in January that would in—could in theory impact another person who could be replacing them on the Council. So that was the reason for the kind of contortion there.

Mayor Jake Woodford 53:35

Alder Croatt. Did you have anything else?

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 53:37

Not on the amendment.

Mayor Jake Woodford 53:38

Okay. Alder Alfheim.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 53:41

Thank you chair. This does seem to be the never ending conversation. But we do have to give credit to the fact that there are some that are trying to find ways that are creative to create dollars in a difficult financial situation. I appreciate very much the fact that on the amendment, that it's a combination, right? We are trying to leave in an access to those who need it, who may not be ourselves. And at the same time we are trying to take those excess dollars and put them someplace of value. I think that in reality, the \$7,200 number is a false number. I know that I as many others have not used the parking pass in the last two years. So \$7,200 is assuming that we all were using it. That's not true. So the number itself, I think is a false sense of accomplishment. We had half of those dollars at least already. So my opinion is there are those in our community that the parking concept may deter them from wanting to come

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downtown. Whether you think it's rational or not is a moot point. It is possible. I don't think that we need to remove it. I think that coming downtown for some leads to more troubles than others. Our parking and those of us that have turned in our passes over the last two years have come because most of us are using the same spot, which is no longer going to be an empty lot within a short period of time. So I think in the future, we may all be dealing with whether this is necessary or not. In today's term, where we're trying to take the dollars, I support the amendment that says for those of us who voluntarily turn them in the dollars are going to be put towards our public safety as Alder Firkus recommended.

Mayor Jake Woodford 55:37

Alder Del Toro.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 55:40

Thank you Chair. I just want to commend alder Firkus for this amendment. Shows willing to compromise and come to a reasonable solution. I especially appreciate the allocation to a fund that will have noticeable impact where \$7200 can potentially have a noticeable impact, as opposed to a concrete budget. So I strongly encourage our colleagues to support this amendment.

Mayor Jake Woodford 56:07

Alder Firkus.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 56:08

Thank you, chair. I just want to add some comments just to kind of give a little background of where I came to this from. On Friday on the Apple—on Facebook, the Appleton Police Department shared a post of a donation of handwarmers, from Shirley and Albert Schmidt, and that kind of got my thoughts thinking about where this could go. Because one of the criticisms I had offered of this resolution was that, among from the 7000, not having a very noticeable impact on the concrete, I also can see that it is very hard to find a way to put that money towards something that would be noticeable and make an impact in this community. And this is something that not only does it benefit the homeless people that could potentially receive some sort of help through this. It's also assisting our officers who are frontline assisting people that are dealing with homelessness right now. There's been stories in the past of our officers paying for jackets and other stuff out of their own pockets for people they're trying to help. And this is just one way where we can choose—we can make our own decision on whether or not how important this parking passes to each of us as individuals, and if we say "You know what? I don't really need this. I can do without it," then we know that money is going to go somewhere where it's going to do some real benefit. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 57:26

Alder Croatt.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 57:27

Thank you, Mayor. The more I think about this amendment, the more like it. I have a question for our Finance Director, if I may. If, hypothetically speaking, the entire body said "We like this amendment; we're all turning our passes in," would the police department received \$7,200 on January 1?

Mayor Jake Woodford 57:52

Director Ohman.

Director Jeri Ohman (Finance) 57:54

Thank you chair. The full amount. If I'm understanding the amendment correctly, would not be transferred on January 1. it would take into account anyone who whose entire term is within 2023 and then for those whose term goes through the [...] that would be the amount that would be transferred to

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the police department. Then the remaining amount would wait until after elections to find who keeps passes or who turns them in.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 58:30

Okay, so thankfully—thank you for that clarification. I would encourage support for this. And I would encourage everyone that has a full year next year to turn it in and put this money to a better use. It's excessive spending. It's more than three times what's necessary to park downtown for meetings. So I am in support of the amendment. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 58:54

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 58:55

Thank you Chair. Yeah, just as a couple of comments of perspective, for the benefit of the audience that is still sitting here, I just wanted to offer some perspective that, you know, there's 15 of us who serve at a minimum of several hours a week and sometimes two or three times that amount for a small amount of money. And this is one small area we have some minor control over monies. The budgets have become incredibly hard to manage and move around to our liking, and this is one very minor, like almost miniscule, amount of money that we can put towards something that we may feel personally is more beneficial. I don't use my parking pass. I would love to find a better reason to use those small dollars, and I feel like this resolution does that. But I think it's important to understand this dollar amount is miniscule in the vast volume of the budget and given what this committee has control over. So I just want the—those who are in attendance to understand what we're debating and what we're talking about here. And I would fully support this amendment to do something worthwhile for those of us who elect not to use the parking passes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:00:24

That's right. Okay. [Note: Mayor Woodford was responding to something said off mic, not to what Aldersperson Schultz had said.]

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:00:28

Thank you. I am really grateful for this amendment. I think that we have really been struggling to come up with this creative solution, and I'm just so proud of an honor to be able to be part of Aldersperson Firkus' work by supporting this tonight, and I hope that all the rest of us feel the same way. Thank you.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 1:00:58

Thank you, Chair. I would just like to echo on Aldersperson Meltzer's uh words. I think this is a great idea. In trying to come up with a solution myself, I did not think of this. So I just want to really complement this amendment, and I will be supporting it. And I also will be handing in my parking pass to support that. So thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:01:22

There being no further discussion on the amendment, we'll vote. Please cast your votes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:01:43

Motion passes 13 one with Alder Hartzheim opposed. We're back to the item as amended. Any further discussion on the item as amended? Yes. Thank you. The attorneys reminded me this is a budget adjustment therefore requires a two thirds vote to pass. And it is a vote notwithstanding meaning an aye vote will approve this resolution as amended, a nay vote will deny the resolution as amended. Okay, any questions? Okay, is there any further discussion? Hearing none, please cast your votes.

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Mayor Jake Woodford 1:02:33

Notwithstanding vote, so an aye vote approves the resolution as amended a nay vote would deny it.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:02:46

Motion passes 14 to zero. Resolution as amended has been passed.