

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

Finance Committee
Mon, Dec 12, 2022 5:30PM

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 09:07

Alright, so we will move on to our action items for the evening. Starting with item 22-1576 Resolution 12-R-22 elimination of council parking passes.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 09:20

Move to deny.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 09:21

Second.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 09:23

A motion and a second. I guess. Trying to think of how I want to proceed with this because this is an item--I guess my first question I would like to ask if I can is, this is exactly the same as the budget amendment that had been offered previously, correct? There is--is there any changes since that was offered to this item? Oh, sorry. Yeah. Alder Fenton?

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 09:52

Chair thank--I think it's the budget amendment was for 90%--the parking passes--and this is for 100%. I actually corresponded with Attorney Behrens asking about reconsideration under Rule 11 Council rules and heard back that that would have had to have been done at the time it was introduced.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 10:18

Okay.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 10:20

That's my history.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 10:20

Okay. So, this is--there is a difference here. I just wanted to make sure because I what I wanted--what I'm trying to avoid is that we basically repeat the exact same things we said five weeks ago. So, I guess with that, I'm also wondering, is there--has anything changed, circumstantial wise, that would have prompted the reintroduction of this, if anyone? Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 10:51

What's changed for me is that there's been much more feedback from my constituents in this regard, since it was discussed in budget, and since I published it in my blog.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 10:59

Okay, thank you. All right. So, I guess, is anyone have anything more different, new to add to the conversations that we've had recently? Alder Hartzheim.

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Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 11:15

Thank you, Chair. As mentioned, I got a lot more feedback from my constituents in this regard since we talked about it in Budget Saturday. I believe that the constituents in this city aren't aware that this amount of dollars is being put forth to fund--to unnecessarily fund additional parking for the aldermen in this city. I believe that it costs far less than \$480 per alderman to make appropriate parking available to the aldermen in the city and so do many of the constituents that have read my blog and replied to me in that regard. So, I think it bears some further discussion in that regard. Is this appropriate? Is this what we should be doing as servants to the community? Thank you.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 12:12

Thank you. Anyone else? I guess I'll? All right, Alder Croatt.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 12:19

Thank you, Chair. Well, my position really hasn't changed on this. I don't believe that I was that involved in the discussion when it was--before at budget time. And I've been thinking about it since then and did some did some calculations and thought about, you know, it's been a, quote, unquote, benefit that we have. We don't have a lot of benefits as you all know. This, this role doesn't come with anything other than a small compensation, annual compensation. But this this to me, is--there's other ways to do this, that cost less. And, for me, \$40 permit is excessive, and it shouldn't, we shouldn't be asking the taxpayers to fund that excessive amount. I figure if you come to, you know, your minimum meetings and a couple of optional meetings, and you plug the meter for two hours, you're gonna spend about \$13 a month to do that. And that's if there's a meeting, two meetings a month, and if you come to some optional meetings, you--the cost to come to those meetings, if that's the intent of the permit, is to be able to come to the meetings and be able to park. Sometimes the on-street parking is more convenient than the ramp, but you could accomplish this with less funds. And that's the reason why I got involved with the resolution, helped with some of the wording on it. And I just think that it's, it's not essential, and it's excessive, and that's why I joined on.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 14:09

Thank you. Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 14:11

Thank you. I think when this was discussed at budget time, and then subsequent to that at our other meetings regarding potential changes for this, we tried to look at a number of ways to still allow council members to have the quote unquote, benefit of taxpayer funded parking while trying to reduce it from the amount that I think generally, at least in my opinion, the sense I got from all of the meetings we've talked about this at recently, that we're all on the same page is excessive. The sticking point here seems to be how best to do it. And I think we really tried in that those most recent meetings to come up with a number of ways to make that make that work in some other way that just wasn't spending \$7,200 for parking permits for all council members. Remember, half of the council isn't using them as we speak. So, we can park--in addition to what Alder Croatt was saying, you can park on Franklin Street or north of Franklin Street, a block and a half from here for 25 cents an hour. So, you can come to your committee meetings for an entire month for \$2. I mean, this just does not make sense to charge taxpayers \$480 for something that should cost us \$2. It's just wasteful, guys. It's ridiculously wasteful. And I think it's just time for us to move on from this. This is this shouldn't be this controversial. It shouldn't even take this much discussion. Our job is to be as financially responsible for taxpayers as we can be. And this is just unnecessary. So, I'm really encouraging you guys to consider changing your minds on this and vote to approve this.

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Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 15:56

All right, thank you. Anyone? Okay, yes. We'll start with Alder Van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 16:05

Thank you Chair. I'm not going to rehash the things I said at budget time. But I guess I saw the negotiation here as allowing for receipts and expenses to be reimbursed. But it's my understanding, based on speaking with Finance Department that that's not reasonable. They, they don't have the time and the manpower to do that. And as someone who deals with expense reports, I understand how that fluctuates. I guess, I would have liked to see an actual proposal on how this would be handled. It sounds like if I'm understanding the author's correctly, their intention is to just not have a reimbursement of any sort. But that's what I would have liked to see in this resolution. And I think it would have also resolved the issue of being a significant enough change for us to review it. Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 17:02

Thank you. Alder Meltzer.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 17:04

Thank you. I think that, you know, we can we can have a discussion about whether or not we should have parking passes for everyone. And I think that that discussion needs to involve a replacement. You know, if we get rid of the parking passes, what do we replace it with? I think that the amount of money that we are designating towards parking passes, does not cause less money to be designated to something else, it's not taking money away from something else in particular. So, I would really like to see a particular thing that would benefit for moving this money there. I just don't find it meaningful at all, to add another marginal amount of money to the concrete budget. I'd rather be able to evaluate the value of two different things. I have a mental concept of the value of the parking passes, and what we gained by keeping them and what we lose by losing them. So, what's the trade off? If we're getting rid of them, what are we getting of equal value or of comparable negotiable value? I don't see that in this resolution at all. Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 18:18

Anyone else? Alder Croatt.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 18:25

I don't think there needs to be a tradeoff. There doesn't need to be a replacement program. The replacement is if you choose to pay, or if you choose to park in front of a meter during the enforcement hours, you pay you plug that meter. If you choose to have a ramp pass, you pay for that ramp pass. I don't--it was not in my intent to bring forward a replacement program for this. It was my intent is to see this go away and find alternative forms of parking for the meetings that you attend. I didn't want to complicate it with a replacement program of reimbursement. I would never ask staff to do an expense report for parking. That just seems like way too much work. And I don't really understand why we would have to have something to replace it.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 19:20

I had Alder Meltzer next.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 19:22

Thank you. Well, I think that the resolution inherently talks about putting this money towards concrete. So that involves replacement in the conversation from the get go. We are replacing parking passes with concrete fund. So why not just put forward a resolution that says starting in our next budget we'll remove the parking pass line item all together? And you know, have it be much cleaner. We don't have to worry about what we just voted on

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in the budget. If the issue really is that we think that it's excessive to have this parking pass benefit, then why not just talk about getting rid of it entirely?

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 20:01

I said--

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 20:02

Instead of just taking this pot of money and putting it here one year and putting it back and putting it back and forth.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 20:07

Alright, so right now in the queue, I have Alder Van Zeeland. Alder Hartzheim and then Alder Siebers. So

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 20:13

I guess I'm confused then about why we are leaving 10% of that budget in the parking is--you're taking 90% of the Oh, I'm sorry, is this? This is 100%. What is the difference between? What is the difference between the proposal for 100% and 90%? It's my understanding the authors had meant to initially last time have there be a reimbursement for 10% which would be, I guess, technically \$300. It's my understanding now, if you could just clarify it, they don't want any replacement at all. There'd be no reimbursement. Alders need to pay to use the city parking ramp.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 21:01

That's my understanding.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 21:02

Okay.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 21:05

Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:07

Thank you, Chair. Alder Meltzer asked about getting value from this. The value that we get from this is that we do not take excess funds from our constituents. It does not cost us \$480 a year to park here to do our jobs for what the purpose of this parking pass is. So, I don't see that we have two apples for apples compare what value we're getting out of this. It is unnecessary for us to penalize the taxpayers of the city for a amount of money that it does not cost us to expend. Also--

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 21:49

Oh, sorry, I sorry. I thought you were done. Please go on.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 21:51

I apologize. Also, this unnecessarily--we have to remember this unnecessarily, sort of props up our parking utility budget as well. So, this--some people say, "well, this is just a paper transaction, it doesn't really cost." Well, it does cost because these, this \$7,200 is artificially propping up the balance sheet--er not the balance sheet, but the income statement for the parking utility. It's saying that our parking utility is doing better than it is. And that's not true. So, we have to be honest with our constituents in all respects. And that's where I find this an egregious thing. Thank you.

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Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 22:29

Alder Siebers?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 22:30

Thank you. One of my concerns that I have is in terms of setting a precedent. We had budget Saturday. We had budget adoption. We had a lot of discussion on this. A vote was taken and a budget was passed. And my concern is that if we're going to start bringing up things that we passed in our budget, you know, here and there and there, it's going to be kind of chaotic. And my thought is why have Budget Saturday? Why don't we just have a ongoing discussion on the budget? The other thing is we talking about how great we are in terms of saving taxpayers money. I remember way back when I was much younger on the Council, and I was deleting this from the budget and deleting that from the budget and deleting this and that and I felt pretty good because everybody was supporting me. And I turned to our Finance Director and I said, "How am I doing in terms of saving the taxpayer money?" "Well, you're getting close to a penny." So, you know, in the scheme of things, how are we doing in regards to saving the taxpayer money? You know. Now granted, it's an amount of money. But in regards to the total budget, it doesn't really amount to a heck of a lot. Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 24:11

Sorry did you...?

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 24:12

She had the...

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 24:12

Okay, okay. Alder Hartzheim is up now.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 24:16

Thank you, Chair. While I appreciate Alder Siebers comments, what's wrong is wrong. Taking too much from our constituents is wrong, whether it's pennies or not pennies, Bill--er Alderman Siebers.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 24:31

That's fine.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 24:32

Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 24:34

Just real quick, this is not necessarily returning money to taxpayers. It is just moving money we are collecting from taxpayers from one budget line to the next. So just to clarify here, we are not doing it--we are not--nothing here that has been proposed or in the resolution or otherwise is a savings. It's--correct me if I'm mischaracterizing this. This is coming with the idea that this money could be better spent somewhere else. Is that a fair assessment Alder Hartzheim?

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 25:03

Thank you Chair. Yes, that is a fair assessment. However, we have to realize that the reason that we want to do this is because it is--it feels wrong. It feels inappropriate to overcharge our constituents for this.

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Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 25:17

Thank you. Thank you. Now, I just real quick, just to interject. So, us as alders, we work here, what? Six days two--so about six days a month. You figure you come in twice a week, twice for committees. Once for common counsel. You might be in more frequently you might be in less for other reasons. So, we work about six out of 20 days. Now we have employees--all employees get, full time employees get a parking pass, is that correct? And, and part time too? Okay. So, and not all of our employees are in the office full time. So, we do have some hybrid, correct? Some work from home some parts of the week. So, we do have at least some precedent of not everyone uses the full benefit of this pass. So, I think if we try and--if we look at that way, we're not necessarily you know. We could just as easily say like, well, if you're only in here two days a week, you got to pay for your own, sorry, you're on your own. But alder Hartzheim I'll let you go since I'm not really

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 26:27

Thank you chair. If you look at it that way, that is true. However, most of the part time people that work for the city work during the day, which is a very different story then people like us who come in after hours and are able to park after the parking meters are enforced. Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 26:45

Alder Fenton.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:46

Thank you Chair. As Alder Siebers and several others have pointed out, this has been attempted multiple times. And at budget Saturday mustered two votes. Now we've got a third cosigner for this. We have wasted a lot of time on political theater, and virtue signaling. And what we're doing is kind of the same thing that we're did--that I have railed about on alder salaries. We're trying to say that only a certain class of people can--are the people that we want to serve as alders. We want people who can afford to work for depending on how much time you put--and I know some of the people who introduced this resolution, devote a lot of time outside of committee meetings--but we're saying we want people who are willing to work for, you know, \$10 \$12 an hour, we want people who are willing to pay for their, you know, to pay their own parking. It's not a huge, huge benefit. But it's something that indicates that the city is willing to compensate you a little bit for the use of your time, for your--to make it a little more convenient for you to serve your community. And I hope that this ends after next week, because honestly, the reruns have become tiresome. Thank you.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 28:32

Alder Doran, and then Meltzer next.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 28:36

Thank you. I'm trying to kind of come at this, I guess a little bit different way. The reason that I'm hopeful we're having this discussion, again, to change this is because of the most recent meetings where I felt like we came to the realization that we are we are overcharging our budget for this purpose. We can park for \$2 for the entire month versus \$480 per person. Why wouldn't we do that? It's no more, it's no further to walk than it is from the parking ramp. And if you want something closer, it barely cost more than that. Why do we need to spend \$480 per councilmember when we can spend so much less? And I think the idea that we tried to find these different solutions that just for whatever reason didn't work is where we ended up with this to just get rid of it altogether. Because it's an expense that can be better utilized elsewhere. If you don't like that it's going to the concrete budget then there are lots of other line items in the budget where it can be moved and be more effective than being used for 15 people out of a city of 75,000. This, this isn't that hard guys. It's just not. When we're looking at the biggest bang for our buck of where our dollars go that we take from taxpayers there are a heck of a lot of other places that can go than parking passes for 15 people. I think it's pretty simple. Thank you.

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Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 30:09

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 30:11

Thank you. I think that if we're looking for the biggest bang for our buck for our constituents, I don't think parking passes is what we should be looking at. I don't think that we're in any way penalizing the taxpayers with an excessive expense. And it's not propping up the parking utility because the money designated there when alders are using their passes, that is the parking facility genuinely being used. It's not untrue that that that money that the parking utility is receiving is therefore being used for parking. The money that the council members aren't using gets reabsorbed into the general fund. So, like, like Aldersperson Firkus was saying, either way this doesn't change the expense for our taxpayers. The fact is that the taxes come in and a certain portion is set aside to invest in leadership, to thank us for our service or compensate us or whatever with our salaries, and to provide benefits that are meaningful. One of the benefits we get that we get to use this technology. Imagine how difficult it would be for the city to do business if some people had iPads and others didn't. The parking pass enables everybody to be right here to be on time for meetings. Imagine how difficult it would be when our meetings are all supposed to start on the hour if some people had to walk farther than others--there's not always parking available in the same places. The ramp ensures that if there's not a closer parking spot, we don't have to wait for you to find whatever one you can find and eventually get here. It's about the functionality of us doing business and being able to gather for our meetings. And it's also saying to the people that have been selected by our community to represent us, "You do have space. You do belong here. Don't let the fear of not having a parking space make you worry that you're not going to be able to show up on time to make your vote." Thank you.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 32:10

Anyone else? Oh, Alder Van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 32:13

Yeah, I'll just piggyback on that a little bit. I've been out knocking on doors and when I brought this up over the past weekend, one of my constituents said "I don't want anything getting in the way of you coming down to City Hall if you need to be working at City Hall for me. I don't want there to be anything that makes you hesitate about going there four times a week, five times a week. That's what I want from you." And I see this like a business owner paying themselves rent. You know you pay rent to yourself, that's the proper thing to do to put the funding where it belongs so that you aren't shorting the parking utility either. So that's all. Thank you.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 32:57

Anyone else? Look, I I've gotten feedback also through this item and just alder compensation in general and I have spoken to people who I think would agree with this sentiment that we shouldn't spend money on this. But really, some people think we shouldn't spend money on alderspersons. But that would be against what I've gotten most of my feedback from. Most people feel that it is worthwhile to have some level of compensation because we are doing work. We are doing a job. And most other employers, especially ones that offer parking--I know I used to work for an employer that was in a downtown in a city. They paid for your parking as just as well. Even though they had a pretty flexible whether you're in or out, and we worked at various times a day. I mean, computers are up 24/7. So, it's a nice weekends you name it type of situation. I guess I just I don't see this as actually fixing anything. I don't see this having even a motivation towards putting this money towards something that's actually going to make a difference in the lives of our community. \$7,000 is a hard amount of money to make a big difference with. And if that's what it takes to make parking a little bit easier to make accessing this job a little more equitable for the people that want to serve in this community, for the people that choose to use

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that perk, I think that's just fine. Anyone else? All right, go ahead and vote. All those in favor the denial? Opposed? Abstention? Motion passes five zero.