

Item 24-1268: Request from Appleton Downtown Inc. for free ramp and meter parking on Small Business Saturday, November 30, 2024

Common Council

Wed, Oct 02, 2024 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 52:37

All right, with that, we'll move into public participation. We do have two members of the public who signed up to speak. We'll ask that you limit your comments to five minutes per person, and that you're speaking on items that appear on the agenda. So, with that, I'll welcome first Jennifer. Welcome.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 53:00

Thank you so much. I'm Jennifer Stephany. I'm the executive director with Appleton Downtown Incorporated. This evening, prior to the council meeting, was a Municipal Services meeting whereby we had a request for free parking for Small Business Saturday. That request was denied. And I'm here to say that this request is not for ADI. It is in support of our small businesses on this one special day.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 53:36

This is a request to ask the city to partner with us as we work hard to bring new people, returning people down to our small businesses, to downtown, to hopefully spend the day to expend those dollars and to show that support. We invest 1000s of dollars to bring new people to downtown for Small Business Saturday. We asked them to start with coffee, to shop, to stay for lunch, to shop some more, to catch dinner. It's an important day.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 54:14

If the ramps are too challenging and it's too large of an investment for the utility, we ask for your reconsideration for free on-street meter parking on this economically valuable day. It will be a day with increased visitors, whereby the city will very likely experience or realize an increase in their ramp revenue.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 54:42

I'd like to share just an excerpt from a letter that I did include to the Municipal Services Committee members. I'll just share this real quick. This is from the owner of Lillian's of Appleton. "We've own Lillian's of Appleton in Downtown Since 2016. Small Business Saturday is by far the biggest day of the year for us. It is the day where people in Appleton show up and support all of the small businesses we have here. Some say they save all their shopping for that one day because they really want to show up for small shops. We see so many new faces on that Saturday, and the vibe is absolutely electric. The gesture is small, but the outcome will be huge. As a small business owner who works hard every day, please take us up on offering the free parking on this one very special day." I ask you for your consideration on this request and appreciate the conversation tonight. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 55:45

Next is Nate Weyenberg. Welcome, Nate.

Nathan Weyenberg (Angels Forever - Windows of Light) 55:48

Welcome. Thank you. My name is Nathan Weyenberg. I own Angels Forever - Windows of Light, 310 West College Avenue. I—talking about retention, I've been in downtown Appleton for 28 years. I do TV ads, and the last thing I always say is "downtown Appleton." Every night, at six o'clock, the parking meters are free,

subsidizing the restaurants and bars. You're giving them free parking. I'm asking for free parking on one day, our biggest day of the year.

Mayor Jake Woodford 56:25

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 56:32

Looks like that's all who signed up. Is there anyone else who'd like to speak in public participation? Okay? Seeing none, we'll close public participation.

[Cut]

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:01:17

We'll take up the item from municipal services committee. This item 24-1268, request from Appleton Downtown, Inc, for free ramp parking and meter parking on Small Business Saturday, November 30, 2024. I'll just make a note, because we had a special meeting just before this, the motion at committee was recommendation for denial that passed out of—the denial passed out of committee at a vote of three, two. So, what's before you is a recommendation for denial.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:01:50

And let's have a motion here. We have a motion and a second to approve, and with that, we'll open the floor for discussion with Alder Meltzer. Yeah, the motion is to approve the denial, which would uphold the denial at committee. All right, Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:02:10

Thank you. There are two different things I want to do. I'm not sure in what order they would make sense, but I do want to if it—I do want to make an amendment to remove the reference to ramps, so that the item before us is just a consideration of the free on street parking. I also would like to request that this vote be notwithstanding, so that it's less confusing as to whether we're approving or denying it/

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:02:41

Sounds good. So, this will be a not withstanding vote, and, Alder Meltzer, if you just put your if you'd put your motion as a motion, we can see if there's a second.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:02:49

I did.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:02:53

All right, we have a motion and a second to amend. This would be striking references to the ramps. All right, we'll open the floor for discussion on that. This is on the amendment. Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:03:07

Thank you, Chair. I know we had a very in-depth discussion about this in 2023 at about this same time of the year, and we talked about—in many points, we've talked about the need for us to increase revenue into our parking utility. And one of the concepts that I really believe in is that, in essence, marketing the value of these resources to us downtown is something that is going to be necessary in order to get people to realize the value, and this is ramp and parking. It is without question that the biggest challenge we have when businesses leave us downtown, that they will talk about parking—every time. So, I think that at some point in time, we're going to

have to realize that investment is going to be necessary to help people realize the great resource that we have available that we invest money in and we spend hundreds of 1000s of dollars to maintain, and the best way to do that is to have one—have someone try it out.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:04:14

I truly believe in that. I wish that we did not need to have the amendment. I appreciate that the discussion is still going on, but as a community, we are the downtown. Our job is to bring people downtown so that we maintain that and we continue and we grow and we get bigger and better. I understand the loss of revenue, but it is absolutely an investment in our small business community and our community themselves to realize that they're going to be able to walk that block and a half after all, because that's our challenge. Our challenge is people don't see that unless they park right in front of some place there's any parking available, and we can help them. We can help them to utilize this.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:05:02

So back to the amendment before the mayor yells at me, I hope that we will thoroughly reconsider this conversation, at least with the amendment. And I really wish that we would have gone back to looking at it fully. I understand that ADI put the request in in August—August 21—and I wish that we could have had deeper conversations as to what the value of providing this service on a very, very important day to us and our business community downtown. I think it's unfortunate that we didn't have very thorough answers as to why we should not, or why we could, and I would hope that, please, whatever we end up with today, that next year it is a real conversation before this point in time to say dollars invested by our community to help attract people to our ramps on Small Business Saturday is actually money made in the long run, and I would please ask that we put that on our calendars. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:06:08

Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 1:06:11

Thank you, Chair. On that note in there, I was going to make a point that it would actually help us advertise our ramps as well. So, I don't necessarily want to vote for this amendment, but I do want to vote for free parking because I think that it would bring people to our ramps and then they could, you know, see that it's not that bad. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:06:42

Alder Smith.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:06:44

Yes, I find myself in agreement with the idea that this is a form of advertising, that there's a lot of effort and a lot of money being put into the downtown, and this is a small thing that the city can do to kind of help light that fire and bring people here. I do regret that the ramp itself isn't—it seems to be technical problems with how that exactly would work. But you know, one of the best benefits of this would be to get people used to and give them a sense of being able to go into those ramps. So, I hope that that can be solved in the future like Alder Alfheim said, but I do think this is a small way for the city to really show support with downtown. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:07:25

Alder van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 1:07:28

Thank you, Chair. I just want to echo this the sentiments of Alder Alfheim. I recall the conversation at Municipal Services last year where we all felt we wanted to do something, we preferred the ramp, but we were under a time crunch, and that's where we are again today. I want to urge my fellow alders not to punish our business owners like Mr. Weyenberg, but I just want to make it very clear that I will not be voting in favor of something like this at the last-minute next year. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:08:03

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:08:06

Thank you. As Alder Alfheim brought up, this request was submitted in August, and so part of why there is such a time crunch had to do with it not appearing on the agenda. So, I think that also there's certainly, I don't want anyone to think that ADI brought this to us too late again this year, that, you know, they were encouraged to bring it to us earlier last year, and they tried their best. So, I encourage all of my colleagues to support this amendment. I know that a lot of us really would much rather support free ramp parking. There are some, it seems, insurmountable challenges right now. So, I look at this not as a desire not to do that, but a compromise so that we can continue to support the small businesses this year. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:09:02

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 1:09:05

Thank you, Chair. I'm generally in agreement with the sentiment that a little money spent is a little money brought in, or a lot more money brought in, potentially. But as a former business owner and as an accountant, I would like to have a little bit more detail on as to what increased sales do we see? Can ADI provide us that in the future? So, in general, I think that the amendment on the table is an acceptable one, and it is what we did last year, but I'm becoming a little bit fatigued with assuming that this is doing so much good and not really having any true documentation that it is doing some good. So, I would look forward to that in the future year, and I think I would encourage my colleagues to vote for this amendment. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:09:59

Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:10:01

May I ask a question on the staff? The question I have is, earlier, there was a conversation during the municipal services, and it had to do with the technicalities of whether we could, if we chose to utilize the ramp, the method being, you enter, you get a ticket, but on the way out, the gate is left up. In essence, no charge then to leave. Is that an option, or does that not work? I'm confused now.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:10:31

Director Jungworth, do you have—and on you're six, seven...? Well, you're about a week in now. Week today.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:10:39

Welcome to the team.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:10:40

So which mic do you have there? Okay, go ahead.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 1:10:43

Can you repeat your ask, please, just to clarify the process.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:10:48

Yes. So, the ask is, is it possible for people to enter the ramp, get a ticket and then have the gates up on the exits? So, in essence, no ticket is necessary to exit?

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 1:11:04

Not knowing the background of the program, I'm not certain as to how that would be set up. What we've done for specific events is that we've charged or provided staff to charge up front to allow that that in and then left it open on the out. So, I don't know what the restrictions yet of the program would be in the background of that. If that makes sense.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:11:27

May I ask a follow up?

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:11:28

Go ahead.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:11:29

The follow up—and again, I apologize, but this is the day we have to make this decision. So, I just want to make sure we have all the options out there. Is there any other—based on your knowledge or the team's knowledge, is there any other way that we could utilize the ramps on that day to accomplish our mission other than what we've talked about before? In essence, is there a way to, in the software, make it a zero when they go out? Is there anything out there that we have not asked for that is available to us to use us on, on small shop day?

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 1:12:01

Not that I'm aware of. We would need to do more research on that in the future.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:12:11

Okay. Again, I hope next year we have solid answers to what our options will be, and in the meantime, I will do our best, I will hopefully that we can pass this amendment and take what we can get to this year. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:12:27

Alder Smith.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:12:28

Yeah, just as a follow up to Alder Alfheim. I seem to remember—I seem to remember during covid that the ramps were open for a while and we weren't being charged to park there. Was that a special situation with the ramps, or am I misremembering that?

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:12:43

I don't recall. And again, we can get more information from our parking utility. We don't have a representative—

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 1:12:51

Okay.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:12:52

—of the parking utility with us tonight, aside from the Director of the Department who does not deal with the software specifically. Others? All right, we have a motion and a second to amend. Please cast your votes. The motion passes nine to five. The amendment's been approved. We're back to the item as amended. Any further discussion?

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:13:38

All right, this will be a notwithstanding vote. So, an aye vote approves the item as amended. A nay vote denies the item as amended. Everybody, clear? Okay, please cast your votes. The motion passes 10 - 4. The item has been approved.