



CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE

February 12, 2021

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council

FROM: Joe Spadafino, Director of Parks and Recreation *JS*
Mary Ellen Gray, Director of Planning and Development *MEG*
Marvin Howard, Parking Manager *MH*
Courtney Mulvanity, Parking Supervisor *CM*

VIA: Tom Coleman, City Manager *TC*

SUBJECT: Charging Non-Resident Parking Fees in Newark Parks

BACKGROUND

Since the opening of the Newark Reservoir its popularity has increased each year where it is now one of the most visited trails in the State with over 100,000 visitors a year. As a result, on many weekends and evenings the parking lot is filled with cars and overflows to non-parking areas and along Old Papermill Road, many of which are out of state or non-residents. City Council had discussed the possibility of charging non-residents for parking at the reservoir and other popular parks during the 2021 budget meeting And has asked City staff to investigate possible solutions to overcrowding in these parking lots.

POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION

In response to this request, the Parking Division and Parks and Recreation Department held multiple meetings to go over parking management in Newark Parks, establishing equipment options and some of the process in implementation.

Option 1: Charging for Hourly/Daily Parking with Equipment

Taking a traditional parking approach, those who opt to drive to the park could be charged either an hourly or daily fee for parking their vehicle. Those who park would be expected to pay for their parking upon arrival, much like a City parking lot or on-street in the central business district, before leaving their vehicle for park use. Payment can be made in different ways with both digital processes and physical equipment the City already has experience using. These technologies are:

Passport/NuPark Mobile: Using signage provided by Passport, the City can charge parkers via an application on their smart phone. Many of the City's residents already have this application downloaded, as it is now responsible for nearly 2/3rd of all parking transactions. The user can enter their license plate and make payment via a credit card. This information can be optionally saved by the user for easy payment in the future. We must note that a .25 convenience fee is charged, but it is up to the City how it wants to handle this fee, whether it decides to wrap it into the overall cost or to pass along to the customer. Fees can be structured in a way to charge patrons for any denomination of time (e.g. hourly versus daily pass) and license plates would be listed for Parking Ambassadors and/or the License

Plate Recognition system to enforce in these parking lots. This system is digital only and works best with a physical option available also, a kiosk, for those patrons who do not carry a smart phone. Alternatively, patrons could go online and pay at Passport's website for parking prior to arriving to the park, even without owning a smart phone. This is a low-cost option to the City, as signage is provided by Passport, and all that City staff need to do is install the signage. NuPark, an option that was brought up at Council previously, has since been acquired by Passport.

T2 Multi-Space Kiosks: The City can install T2 kiosks, where a single unit could cover an entire parking area. Patrons would walk up to the multi-space kiosks and enter their license plate. Much like the Passport Mobile system, the kiosk is capable of handling different denominations of time but is a physical option for those who do not want to use a smart phone/computer application to pay for parking. It had the added benefit of accepting coinage, allowing for a physical payment option as well. The combination of the T2 Multi-Space kiosks and Passport mobile is the preferred payment style of City staff, giving patrons multiple payment options, although either platform can handle the task on its own. It must be noted that the City of Newark does not have additional kiosks on-hand and that these units must be purchased from T2 Systems, at around \$7,000 per unit, plus \$90/month in subscription fees, in addition to the installation of the equipment. Once installation is completed, City staff can handle upkeep on T2 kiosks and would be alerted of any issues by the T2 IRIS system.

IPS Single-Space Smart Meters: The City could also repurpose old IPS Smart Meters for the project. While the City has been trying to get away from single-space technology over the last two years, one benefit is that the City does have additional single-space meters on hand. The downside to this is that many consider them to be aesthetically unpleasing, especially in a park environment, as meter poles would need to be installed. Single-space meters also carry a \$13/month subscription fee for each parking space, drastically increasing operating costs for paid parking. This system cannot work in conjunction with License Plate Recognition technology either, as each meter results in a pay-per-space system, rather than a pay-by-plate system. This system would need to be handled on-foot by a Parking Ambassador and can only be charged on an "by time" denomination, rather than by a single daily rate, as it is an older technology.

It is important to note that there will likely be a negative public relations reaction from our patrons, no matter which payment route we go with this pay-by-time method. It will also cost the City financially, as even though most equipment has already been purchased, with exception to the T2 kiosks, using Parking Ambassadors to enforce parks will take them away from the central business district. Parking enforcement in parks will increase the size of the enforcement patrol area due to the increased driving time from leaving the central business district. This will reduce the effectiveness of existing staff in higher density areas, reducing ticket revenue, unless we add additional part-time staff. Subscription fees would also see an increase with any physical equipment. There would also need to be discussion regarding the time denomination, time limit, and cost to the patron when parking in parks.

Option 2: Park Memberships/Permitting through Parking Technology and Pay by Plate Hybrid

In addition to hourly/daily parking rates as outlined in Option 1, the City could offer park memberships or permits allowing for park usage with its current parking technology. This can also go together with other Parks and Rec activities, where a perk for joining a class or activity can be free parking in the park during a pre-determined amount of time. This would incentivize Parks and Recreation programs. Permitting can be done digitally through the T2Flex database, which connects to the License Plate Recognition system on the parking vehicles, or via mobile to the Parking Ambassadors handheld devices, to see if a vehicle has been registered with the Parking Division or Parks and Recreation. The License

Plate Reader will skip by those that have paid their membership (or registered if it is free for residents/utility customers), but if the device reads a plate that has not paid for a membership, it will alert the driver with a “ping” notification and the driver would stop and investigate if the vehicle had indeed paid for a membership or not. Alternatively, this can be done on-foot and manually by a Parking Ambassador in the field, albeit at a slower pace.

There are several ways for a patron to register for a permit, whether it be in-person, by mail, or through the T2 portal. The T2Flex database, in combination with the License Plate Recognition device, allows the City the option to attach a permit to a license plate that shows that they are a paid member of the park as opposed to using a sticker or hang-tag. This lowers the cost of sticker distribution that the City traditionally incurred on parking permits, a direction we are heading already. City staff enters the appropriate license plate into the database, assigns it a park permit, and the vehicle will not be cited after entry into a Parks and Recreation parking lot.

Possible downsides to this method are the time and effort it takes City staff to collect, organize, and enter the information into the T2 system. Cataloging each vehicle that wants to access City parks into the T2 database and assigning it a Parks and Recreation permit would be a hefty task at the beginning for City staff, so the revenue brought in by membership costs must be sufficient to cover the expenses associated to handle the permitting, unless the City is willing to spend money to keep parking spaces open in its parks. It is difficult to estimate what these costs in employee hours would be and we may need to consider an additional future employee if seriously discussing this option.

Option 3: Current System with Heavier Enforcement and Time Limit

Alternatively, the City could keep the current parking system unchanged except for heavier enforcement of time limits in the parks. This would be to ensure that people are not simply parking their vehicles and leaving them to get free parking or in lieu of a residential or municipal parking pass. This could open more spaces to the public who are using the park and force those who are not using the park to move out of it, or risk being cited. This system has the same costs as the above-mentioned options regarding enforcement manpower and casting a wider enforcement net but can be handled at less frequent intervals equal to the time limit within the parking lot. For instance, the park on Kells Avenue is so close to residential areas that many people park their cars in the park to bypass on-street residential parking restrictions. A time limit could eliminate this loophole and result in more spaces available to park users.

Option 4: Donation Program/Overnight Parking

The City could also look at other revenue generating ideas that could fund future parks programs and parking areas. When discussing the feasibility of Parks and Recreation parking with Passport, they noted that other cities had some success with putting up signage that allowed park users to donate money to the park. As the signage would be no cost to the City and the 25-cent transaction fee can come directly out of the donation, this could be a seamless way to collect new funds for the park and to allow users of the park to voluntarily provide assistance, which ultimately could go to increasing the parking capacity in the parks via voluntary crowdfunding efforts.

The City could also investigate allowing overnight parking in parks when they are not in use for parks purposes. Currently, all vehicles must vacate the park by sundown unless there are lit courts or a pre-approved event. As some parks are near residential neighborhoods, there may be interest by the public to park in these lots either on an hourly or a by-night basis. It must be noted in the short term, this may

compound the overcrowding issue though, as once a vehicle parks there is no way to guarantee it leaves unless it is eligible for towing.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Charging for parking in City Parks will indeed increase revenue for the City, but there will be a cost to implement and manage the program for the parking division. It is hard to estimate whether the amount of funds received from non-residents or resident memberships would offset the cost of implementing the system and increased responsibility for the parking enforcement division. Besides the financial piece, this change may have a negative impact on the image of the City and our parks. Newark parks have always been popular for City residents and non-residents, and the reservoir has become more of a regional park attracting visitors from across the County as well out of state due to its proximity to Pennsylvania and Maryland. The area has several components that make it a destination park; the reservoir trail leads to easy access to the Redd Park wooded trail system of over two miles making the area a destination for walkers, joggers, cyclists and bird watchers. The addition of Newark's all-inclusive playground, Preston's Playground, has also become a destination for many families. When visiting our parks, people have a chance to unwind, relax, exercise etc., paying a parking meter or registering your vehicle to park could be considered a nuisance to many.

Another potential issue with charging for parking in the parks could be that this pushes vehicles out into nearby neighborhoods that are not part of the special resident parking program, which the parking division would like to avoid. We estimate that there are two entrances to Redd Park in the Woods of Louviers, four in the Hunt of Louviers, and other access from Middle Run Meadow, Pine Meadow Apartment complex, Nonantum Mills and Temple Beth El. All of these trailheads could become parking areas for those who wish to avoid paying for parking at the Reservoir. It is likely that some of the out of state plates we see in our parks are University students, individuals employed by Newark companies, or people who spend money in Newark after their visit to the parks for dinner, drinks, shopping etc., a benefit to the Newark economy. If implemented at the Reservoir, we would need to include both the Newark Reservoir Park and Curtis Mill Park due to their proximity.

The parking area does generate a lot of trash for the Reservoir, adding two to three extra days of trash pickup during the spring through fall months. The overflow parking along Old Paper Mill Road can be hazardous for pedestrians and families. The trash issue will not go away with parking fees, but revenue generated from parking may generate funds to help manage our park system.

Requiring payment for parking at the future Rodney Park will have some but not all of the same issues. Fortunately, Rodney is already surrounded by special residential parking districts so it is unlikely that there will be overflow parking issues. There also used to be meters on Forest Lane so this wouldn't be a new feature for the area. The proximity to the downtown and UD's large classrooms near Smith Hall will also make this a popular parking area for UD students going to class, especially if the parking is free. Charging for parking will need to be accompanied by a requirement that the parking is only for use of the Rodney park to avoid students using this as classroom parking. We could waive this requirement outside of the regular class hours on Mondays through Friday as well. Staff will be prepared to discuss Rodney specific options following additional discussions ahead of the 2/22/2021 meeting.

Parking Payment Dilemma

One of the questions that was asked when having our internal meetings was, "who should be responsible to make payment when arriving in a park." Does the City want all park patrons who bring a vehicle to pay for parking? Only out-of-state vehicles? Only those who do not live in City limits? This is a

difficult question but one that must be answered as we discuss the above options. Out-of-state vehicles would be the easiest to separate from in-state vehicles for the Parking Ambassadors, as license plates are easily identifiable by the ambassador and the license plate reader. In-state vehicles can simply be ignored when driving through the Parks and Recreation parking lot, but there are several legal questions regarding this method. Not charging City of Newark residents would be possible but brings with it the cataloging and organization associated with pre-registering each vehicle that wishes to enter the program and verifying that they do indeed live within the City limits, which would be a large task. This is also complicated by the large number of Newark addresses that are not within the municipal boundary of Newark. Many of these people mistakenly assume they are Newark residents which is certain to cause difficulties in implementation.