



Idea would expand pay-to-park sphere
Oregonian, The (Portland, OR)
March 7, 2006
Author: ANNA GRIFFIN; The Oregonian
Estimated printed pages: 3

SUMMARY: Business districts The thought is to spend change where it lands, be it Hawthorne or St. Johns

The days of free **parking** in Portland's bustling **neighborhood** business districts might soon end.

But wait. Before you grab a few extra quarters --or the telephone to make an angry call to City Hall --the guy suggesting meters in places such as the Hawthorne district, St. Johns and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard wants to explain.

One, this is entirely voluntary for the districts. Two, it's very early in the planning.

And three, he knows a lot of people will, at least at first, think it's a lousy idea.

"I know this is counterintuitive," said City Commissioner **Sam Adams**, who oversees the Portland Office of Transportation. "But it's very possible the best way to preserve and enhance some of our business districts is to charge for **parking**."

Here's his thinking: The Portland Office of Transportation has a massive backlog of maintenance and construction work, including 600 miles of unpaved roads. Almost all of the city's fast-growing **neighborhood** business districts would benefit from basic improvements such as wider curbs and sidewalks, new trees and plantings, additional TriMet stops and, in a few cases, off-street **parking**. And the City Council has no money.

The possible solution: Add **parking** meters and spend the revenue in the **neighborhood** where it is raised.

The concept comes from Donald Shoup, an urban planning professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. In his book, "The High Cost of Free **Parking**," Shoup writes that the United States' plethora of free **parking** adds to congestion, hurts the environment and leads to less sustainable cities.

Adams, who acknowledges that this is something of a trial balloon, heard Shoup speak at a conference last fall. He was particularly impressed, he says, by his story of the success a Pasadena, Calif., business district had using new meters to pay off construction debts from an off-street **parking** garage.

In Portland, drivers plunk down an average of \$1,800 annually per downtown **parking** space and less than half that in the Lloyd District, according to the Office of Transportation. Along with the Pearl District and Oregon Health & Science University, those are the only areas in town with metered **parking**.

"Someplace like St. Johns is a good example of a place that could use more money," **Adams** said. "I don't know if we're going to have enough **parking** demand there, or if the businesses will think it's a good idea. But that downtown has got such good bones, and I have so little money to help them with infrastructure."

So far business owners don't sound thrilled.

Gary Boehm, president of the St. Johns Business Boosters, informally polled about 35 business owners and managers after receiving a letter from the city. None wanted meters, he said.

But they "are keeping an open mind," Boehm said. The **neighborhood** is growing, with lots of new housing. **Parking** will only get tighter.

"A lot of people have forgotten that the St. Johns Bridge just reopened in November, and this business community is still recovering from that economic downturn," Boehm said. "Let's let the economy recover, and then maybe something like this might be worth looking at."

Across town on Hawthorne Boulevard, business district president Mary Sellin says she's never heard homeowners complain about the shoppers and Hawthorne visitors who crowd **neighborhood** streets on weekends.

Still, she's willing to let the city study the idea of adding meters.

"On the one hand, it might be a good way to pay for some needed projects. On the other, it might kill the districts," she said. "We need to look hard at other communities that have done this to see what the impact was.

". . . The city is talking about a yearlong study. That should probably be a two- or three-year study."

Anna Griffin: 503-294-5988; annagriffin@news.oregonian.com

Edition: Sunrise

Section: Local News

Page: B02

Copyright (c) 2006 Oregonian Publishing Co.

Record Number: MERLIN_7583398