



## Pay to Park

### Hawthorne Merchants Say Parking Meters Don't Pay

BY [AMY JENNIGES](#)

**Every day** for the past two weeks, John Chassaing has taken an hour-long break from running his SE Hawthorne and 34th music shop, Showcase Music & Sound, to chat with other businesses along the street. He brings along a folder full of posters he designed—"Say No to Parking Meters!" they declare—and asks shops if they'd like one.

Most businesses have said yes. Chassaing, who avoids mixing business and politics, says the sign is the "first thing I've ever put on my building in all these years."

Chassaing heard about the parking meter proposal three weeks ago—it's City Commissioner Sam Adams' idea—and started talking to neighboring shop owners. Chassaing discovered that they, like him, were worried meters would kill business.

"Everyone I've talked to is overwhelmingly against it," says Chassaing, who has been working on Hawthorne for 30 years. "It's just not good for business. What person is going to pay a dollar to buy something for a few dollars?"

Instead, he says, Hawthorne's merchants are worried that customers will head to a neighborhood where parking is still free. "The only thing parking meters are going to cure is the traffic on Hawthorne."

Not so, argues Commissioner Adams, who stopped by the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association meeting on Thursday night, August 10, to give the parking meter pitch.

Adams' Neighborhood Parking Benefit Program would couple paid on-street parking in neighborhood business districts with parking permits for residents in the surrounding neighborhoods, and transit subsidies for the businesses' employees.

"It's very important to me that our neighborhood business districts work," Adams told the skeptical crowd of neighbors. And he believes that paid parking is—counter intuitively, he concedes—good for business districts.

"Free parking costs jobs, costs businesses profits, and makes neighborhood parking like hell," Adams said. "And free parking, from an environmental side, is profoundly sad."

Subsidizing car culture, he points out, is incongruent with Hawthorne's counter-culture vibe.

Meters, on the other hand, would ensure customer turnover—and more customers means more profits for businesses, Adams says. Meanwhile, nearby residents wouldn't have to battle with customers to park near their own homes. Meter revenues would also pay for adequate parking enforcement in the neighborhood. And finally, profits collected by the meters would stay in the neighborhood, and would be spent at the neighborhood's discretion.

In Old Pasadena—a neighborhood business district in LA—a similar program was implemented, and the neighborhood netted \$1.1 million a year to spend on the street. The nearby mall "closed down in six years," Adams said, because customers flocked to the newly improved street instead.

The program, Adams stresses, is voluntary. "You can decide not to do this, and I'll totally respect that," he told neighbors. But future commissioners might push for meters in neighborhood business districts without letting the community keep the cash (such as downtown, where parking meter revenue goes into the transportation bureau's general fund).

By the end of the Sunnyside meeting, the residents seemed less alarmed by the proposal. However, despite Adams' reasonable proposal, business folks like Chassaing aren't buying it.

"He says the revenue is going to go back into the district," Chassaing says. "Yeah, right. And if it does, it will go into development. It wouldn't go toward lost revenue."