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CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

ACTION REQUESTED:

Approve the staff recommendation to transition all commuter parking to daily fee and eliminate the quarterly permit program

DEPARTMENT: Transportation, Engineering and Development

SUBMITTED BY: Jennifer Louden, Deputy Director

BOARD/COMMISSION REVIEW:

N/A

BACKGROUND:

Prior to 2020, the City's commuter parking programs, comprised of a combination of renewable quarterly permits and daily fee spaces, were not efficiently meeting the needs of the commuter population. This was demonstrated by years-long waitlists for quarterly permits for the Naperville Station, combined with higher utilization of daily fee spaces than permit spaces. A Commuter Parking and Access Work Plan was developed during 2019 to address operational issues and abuses in the City's legacy parking programs. The work plan was developed under the assumption that demand for commuter parking would remain high. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted work and commuting patterns, leading to historic low levels of commuter activity, and creating a need to reevaluate the work plan.

During 2021, commuting activity slowly increased but uncertainty remained surrounding the long-term impact of the pandemic on commuting patterns. On August 17, 2021, the City Council approved two principles to guide continued improvements to commuter parking and access that would build off the accomplishments of the 2019 plan while providing flexibility and adaptability as new commuting patterns emerge:

1. **Principle 1:** The City will provide commuter parking programs that maximize the use of the existing total parking supply by providing flexible parking options and fair privileges to all commuters.
2. **Principle 2:** The City will maintain a multi-modal approach to accessing the Naperville and Route 59 Metra stations.

Since that time, the following actions have been completed in support of the principles:

1. The Parkview Lot was converted to daily fee to increase the number of daily fee spaces at the Naperville Station. Parkview Lot permits were transferred to the Burlington Lot on January 1, 2022.
2. The issuance of new quarterly permits for the Naperville Station lots was halted, and the waitlists were closed to new applicants.

DISCUSSION:

Throughout 2022 staff monitored Metra ridership and commuter parking occupancy at the Naperville and Route 59 stations to assess demand trends. Staff also conducted a survey during September 2022 to gain input from area commuters on whether their commutes have stabilized, how often they commute and what factors influence their commuting patterns. This data is summarized below.

Regional Trends and Metra's Vision

In February 2023, Metra approved a new strategic plan that sets its vision and goals for 2023 through 2027. In the plan, Metra indicates that ridership patterns and service demands have been permanently changed. Prior to the pandemic, Metra's primary function was commuter rail service, with its core service being peak-hour, suburb-to-downtown work commuting. After a 97% decrease in ridership at the start of the pandemic, ridership has steadily regrown over the past three years. However, Metra has seen stronger growth in off-peak and weekend trips than in traditional peak-hour commuter trips. Metra's systemwide ridership is currently at approximately 40% of pre-pandemic levels on weekdays and 60% on weekends. Metra's vision is to move towards a regional rail service model with more off-peak and weekend offerings to adapt to the emerging changes in ridership patterns.

Ridership trends along the BNSF rail line, the Metra line that serves Naperville, are consistent with the Metra systemwide trends. According to a recent Metra report, ridership during peak hours in January 2023 was 45% of the ridership in January 2019. Midday ridership was 57% and Saturday and Sunday ridership were 67% and 61%, respectively.

Permit and Parking Occupancy Data

Staff monitors the number of quarterly permits that are currently issued and tracks parking occupancy through periodic observations and bi-monthly manual counts. Like Metra ridership, parking occupancy has steadily grown since the historic low reached during the pandemic. Daily fee parking spaces are being used more consistently than permit parking spaces. This trend was evident prior to the pandemic and continues today. In the last few months, over 75% of the daily fee spaces are consistently occupied at the Naperville station. Approximately 30% of permit spaces are consistently occupied. Similarly, at the Route 59 station, over 50% of the daily fee spaces are consistently occupied while only approximately 13% of the permit spaces are used consistently.

As noted, this trend was evident prior to the pandemic, but the disparity has grown in part due to many quarterly permit holders canceling their permits. The table below details the number of active permits in February 2020 as compared to February 2023:

Permit Lot	February 2020 Permits	February 2023 Permits
Route 59	1,090	329
Burlington (including Parkview)	982	674
Kroehler	407	329

The significant decline in Route 59 permits is due to the lack of a waitlist. Prior to the pandemic, and today, Route 59 permit holders were more likely to cancel their permits when they weren't using them because they could readily obtain a new permit should their commuting needs change.

2022 Commuter Survey

The decrease in permits and parking occupancy patterns at both stations align with the input received through the 2022 Commuter Survey. Important points from the survey include:

- Most respondents (71%) said that their commute has stabilized.
- The ability to work remotely is the biggest factor in determining future commuting patterns.
- Only 22% of respondents said they use Metra four or more days per week, while 55% said they use Metra one to three days per week.

Recommendation

Regional trends, current occupancy data, and survey input indicate that the commuting patterns that the City's current parking programs were built around no longer exist. In accordance with Principle 1, staff recommends transitioning all commuter parking to daily fee and eliminating the quarterly permit program. Daily fee parking provides fair privileges to all commuters in that it is available to everyone on a first-come, first-served basis. According to occupancy counts, permit spaces at both stations are being underutilized, resulting in many spaces being empty, but unavailable to most commuters. Daily fee parking is also flexible in that commuters only pay for parking on the days they need to commute.

Staff recommends the following transition plan:

1. Establish all spaces as daily fee. This will be accomplished by modifying the current payment identification from space numbers to license plates. Switching to a pay-by-plate model will allow staff to more efficiently manage the large number of spaces available for daily use. This will also improve customer service in that commuters will no longer need to remember their space number.

The modifications will be implemented in July 2023. Prior to making the change, staff will bring the necessary ordinances to modify the Municipal Code to City Council for consideration. Metra and BNSF will also be notified in accordance with existing lease and grant agreements.

2. Discontinue the use of quarterly permits. With the pay-by-plate approach for daily payments,

quarterly permits can be used in conjunction with daily fee for a limited time as a transition. This would allow current quarterly permit holders time to adjust to the new program, while providing access to the permit spaces that currently go unused to other commuters who do not hold a quarterly permit.

Staff will stop issuing new permits for the Route 59 Lot immediately. Use of quarterly permits for all lots will be discontinued on December 31, 2023. Current permit holders will be provided notice of this change. The waitlists for Burlington and Kroehler permits will also be eliminated.

In the future, as parking demand grows, staff will evaluate new technology to improve customer service. This would include tools that would help inform commuters of their parking options, such as real-time parking availability through parking guidance systems. The City could also pursue a parking reservation program for a higher fee should demand reach a point where that is warranted.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Signage modifications will cost approximately \$5,000 to \$10,000. However, these costs will be offset by a reduction in costs typically spent marking space numbers on the parking lot pavement.

Revenue and expenses associated with commuter programs will be under ongoing evaluation as changes are considered. The fee structure for daily parking will be considered as part of the evaluation.