



Legislation Text

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CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

ACTION REQUESTED:

Conduct the first reading on the ordinance amending Section 11-2B of the Naperville Municipal Code to eliminate commuter parking permits and expand daily fee parking

DEPARTMENT: Transportation, Engineering and Development

SUBMITTED BY: William Novack, Director/City Engineer

BOARD/COMMISSION REVIEW:

N/A

BACKGROUND:

For decades, commuter parking options at the City's Metra stations have consisted of a combination of renewable quarterly permits and daily fee spaces. However, these two options are no longer meeting the needs of the commuter population.

Prior to the pandemic, this was illustrated by the combination of years-long waitlists for quarterly permits for the Naperville station and higher use of the daily fee spaces than the permit spaces. The permit lots were oversold by more than 50% and use continued to be lower than the daily fee spaces. Similarly, in the Burlington lot, there were 870 permits for 525 spaces in the third quarter of 2019. In September 2019, the Burlington lot was 90% occupied (472 vehicles observed).

In 2019, a Commuter Parking and Access Work Plan ("Work Plan") was developed to address operational issues with, and abuses of, the City's legacy parking programs. Concurrently, staff was also preparing to implement technology to improve commuter access to the existing parking supply. The Work Plan was developed under the assumption that demand for commuter parking and access would remain high, however, the COVID-19 pandemic led to historic low levels of commuter activity.

Fall 2020

Staff issued a survey during fall 2020 to obtain commuter input that would be used when establishing new goals and actions related to commuter parking and access. At that time, the 2,172 survey responses indicated that:

1. 37% of commuters would commute four or more days per week.
2. 45% would commute one to three days per week.
3. Approximately 75% said that the ability to work remotely would influence their future commuting pattern.
4. 69% said that the City should consider other parking options besides quarterly permits and

daily fee parking.

These survey results informed the City's next steps to improve commuter parking efficiencies.

August 2021

In August 2021, in response to the survey results, as well as the continued impact of the pandemic, the City passed two commuter parking principles to guide future parking improvements. These principles were meant to guide the City as it modifies its approach to commuter parking in order to address long-term challenges with program structure.

The following two principles established the overarching goal for commuter parking and addresses overall access to the station.

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.

Principle 1 Background: Commuters currently have two options for parking at the Naperville and Route 59 stations: a renewable quarterly permit or daily fee. Quarterly permits allow a permit holder to park in a specified lot, but they do not guarantee a space. Prior to the pandemic, all permit lots were oversold to account for their significant underutilization. Many permit holders keep their permits, even when they do not need them. This pattern of behavior led to the City keeping waitlists for the permit lots which grew to over 12 years long. The long waitlists illustrate the demand for parking, but the City is unable to accommodate commuters. Permit holders are not allowed to share their permit because it is not possible to track who is using the permit. This creates a privileged network of permit users and doesn't allow for fair access to everyone in the City. Permit sharing is a common abuse of the permit system and continues to persist.

When the 2021 principles were approved, two of the recommended actions were to commit to improving or eliminating the quarterly permit system by halting issuance of new Naperville Station permits and closing the waitlist to new applicants. The second was to modify the distribution of daily fee versus quarterly permit spaces at the Naperville station by converting the Parkview lot from permit to daily fee. Both of these changes have been implemented.

These changes were communicated to commuters via the Commuter Connection e-newsletter.

Principle 2

The City will maintain a multi-modal approach to accessing the Naperville and Route 59.

Principle 2 Background: The City has historically supported a comprehensive multi-modal approach that provides commuters with a variety of options when accessing the Naperville and Route 59 stations. The following actions were recommended in support of Principle 2:

1. Partner with Pace Bus to identify service for Naperville as commuter activity increases.
2. Maintain appropriate loading/unloading zones for transit vehicles at both stations. Designate rideshare spaces to reduce mode conflicts.

January 2022

The Parkview lot was converted from permit parking to daily fee parking. Existing Parkview permit holders were given Burlington lot permits.

These changes were communicated to commuters by the Commuter Connection e-newsletter and permit holders were mailed a notice with their quarterly sticker prior to the changes taking place.

September 2022

Following the guidance from these principles and the evolving commuting patterns, the City issued a new Commuter Survey on September 7, 2022. The intent of this survey was to better understand current commuting patterns and gather data to anticipate future commuting needs.

The survey was sent out via the Commuter Connection e-newsletter, posted on social media and on the City’s website. Posters with a QR code link to the survey were posted at several locations around both stations. The survey received 780 responses and a summary of the results is below:

- 55% of commuters ride Metra 1-3 days per week.
- People who are not commuting by Metra, but would like to, said that they are concerned about parking availability at the Naperville Metra Station and the cost of parking.
- Most respondents said that they do not have a quarterly permit.
- Most respondents said that their commute has stabilized.

March 2023

In support of the approved principles and results from the 2022 Commuter Survey, staff moved forward with developing a transition plan to eliminate permits and go to all daily fee parking at both stations.

This plan was unanimously approved by the City Council on March 7, 2023.

Immediately following the City Council approval of the transition plan, staff sent out a Commuter Connection e-newsletter informing commuters of the changes. Staff also put inserts in the permit sticker mailing to directly let permit holders know about the upcoming changes. The City’s website was updated with a notice about the approved plan and tentative timeline.

Spring 2023

City staff answered many questions and took feedback from the public and commuters about the proposed changes. In May 2023, the City’s website was updated to reflect that the timeline for the conversion to all daily fee would be pushed back from July 2023 to fall 2023. The roadmap, approved at the March 7, 2023 City Council meeting, established that December 31, 2023 would be the last day that quarterly permits would be used.

DISCUSSION:

Since the announcement of the elimination of quarterly permits, approximately 300 permit holders have canceled. Prior to the pandemic, there were nearly 2,500 permit holders and as of July 13, 2023 there were 943. There are three reverse commute permit holders.

Permit Lot	February 2020 Permits	July 2023 Permits
Route 59	1,090	249
Burlington (including Parkview)	982	512
Kroehler	407	179

Permits have not been offered since March 2020 for the Naperville station and since March 2023 for the Route 59 station. Initially during the pandemic, staff did not want to offer permits and risk having the parking lots be too crowded when commuting resumed. As the pandemic progressed, staff

continued to observe commuting patterns, gather data, and work with the City Council to create a longer-term plan to restructure commuter parking. Due to the decline in permits and lower commuting during the pandemic, the overall balance of the Commuter Fund is down. Taking action on commuter parking is necessary to address the financial position of the Commuter Fund.

As a City asset, the commuter lots are meant to serve the community fairly, but the permit system unintentionally led to a small group of commuters who had priority over others by simply holding on to a permit and many not using it at all. Through extensive commuter engagement and outreach, a new plan was developed based on feedback received from both commuter surveys. By converting all quarterly permit lots to daily fee spaces, there will be flexible parking options and fair privileges for all commuters.

Currently, demand for parking is less than it was pre-pandemic. However, the utilization of the lot is something that City staff closely monitors. Daily fee spaces at the Naperville station have been consistently 85%-90% full this year. The Burlington permit lot has been 50%-65% full this year. Daily fee parking at the Route 59 lot has been 45%-60% full and permit parking has been 10%-16% full this year. Based on the utilization of the permit lots, there are approximately 450 active permit users between both stations.

The City can add an option through PayByPhone, one of the City's commuter parking vendors, to have a weekly or monthly payment option. This would differ from a reservation system, where a space would be set aside for a commuter. Reservation technology would be a more significant investment for the City as it would require a system that could monitor the occupancy of the spaces and also a type of gated system that would restrict who could park in a lot. This level of investment and service is not currently justified, or possible, by the volume of commuting or the funds available. Currently, there is ample parking without a wait or difficulty finding a space.

The proposed rates would be adding the Burlington lot to the \$5.00 parking lots, which include the lots closest to the Naperville station (DuPage Children's Museum, Parkview and 190 E. 5th Avenue). The remaining spaces at the Naperville station would be \$2.00 and all the spaces at the Route 59 station would be \$2.00. The ordinances have been updated to reflect these rates changes and adjust the description of the permit versus daily fee spaces. The Commuter Parking Rules and Regulations have also been updated to reflect the proposed changes.

If the City were structuring the commuter parking system anew, staff would not pursue the current model because it represents an outdated system. The time is right to make these changes because commuting has returned enough to gather meaningful data from commuters, while still being lighter than pre-pandemic. This allows for more flexibility to change the program to better serve commuters by providing more options, and eliminating permits that were underutilized and abused by sharing.

Staff recommendation

Staff recommends conducting the first reading on the proposed ordinance which will establish all commuter spaces as daily fee parking, set the rates and change the payment structure from pay-by-space to pay-by-plate. If approved, commuters would enter their license plate at the kiosk or in an electronic mobile payment application, instead of the parking stall number.

Once approved, the following tasks will need to be completed to finalize the conversion to daily fee parking:

1. Replacing signage in all parking lots.
2. Covering or removing space numbers.
3. Working with the City's vendors, T2, ESS, and PayByPhone to reprogram the parking machine kiosks and mobile application to a pay-by-plate system.

The timeline to implement these changes was approved in March 2023. Following that timeline, commuter parking permits would be eliminated on January 1, 2024. The switch from pay-by-space to pay-by-plate would begin in fall 2023. This allows for time during the fall for permit holders to learn how to use the daily fee payment system. The permit stickers for Quarter 4 are sent out in mid-September. This would be the last quarter for permits. Time needs to be allocated for staff to remove automatic bank drafts and stop billing before permit holders are billed for quarter 1 2024 at the beginning of November.

Prior to the August 15 City Council meeting, commuters were notified that this item would be on the agenda through the following communication channels:

- Commuter Connection e-newsletter
- Updates to the City's website.
- Signs posted at the train stations.

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. Other costs include:

- Paint to cover over the space numbers on the pavement.
- License Plate Recognition camera for enforcement (\$70,000).