

In 2021 The City Commission of Fort Pierce received an official recommendation to put forth a resolution authorizing the implementation of a paid parking system in the city's downtown business and arts district and beach parking area on South Hutchinson Island. This recommendation was the result of a unanimous decision made by the city's parking committee; a volunteer citizen committee tasked with improving the parking conditions in the city and addressing specific parking related issues.

The committee's decision to formally recommend paid parking specifically in downtown was in part the result of a professional parking study commissioned by the City of Fort Pierce and executed by Walker Consultants. In addition, the parking committee has received direct comment from many members of the public, residents and business owners who have attended the public committee meetings to make their parking concerns heard. By far the most common complaint that the committee has received directly from the public has been the regarding the lack of turnover and available parking inventory in downtown's most in demand areas.

To address the many complaints and concerns the citizens of this Fort Pierce have brought to the committee's attention, and in acknowledgement of the professional recommendations given in the parking study provided by Walker Consultants, the Fort Pierce Parking Committee feels the best way to move forward for the city is to implement a paid parking system.

There are three Key objectives for a paid parking system:

- **Turnover:** The on street parking spaces downtown are the highest in demand spaces for visitors and residents looking to patron our businesses. Currently the majority of these spaces are time restricted 2 hour parking. The intention of this restriction is to encourage turnover, reserving these spaces for patrons who only need to park long enough to shop, dine, get a haircut, etc. Unfortunately, the city does not have the resources available to properly enforce the 2 hour parking in a consistent enough way to assure that the downtown businesses properly benefit from the restriction. The result is chronic violation of the 2 hour parking restriction by many members of the public who regularly park in these spaces all day without major fear of penalty. This parking condition is of no benefit to the downtown business community or the patrons who seek convenient on street parking when they come downtown.

To properly enforce the 2 hour restrictions to the point where violations were no longer prevalent would require a significant financial investment by the city in additional staffing, vehicles and equipment. These costs would fall directly on the taxpayers (even those who do not live, work or patron downtown) and would be "in perpetuity costs" that would need to be carried in the city's budget every year. Furthermore, the parking restrictions currently end at 5pm on weekdays and are not in place on weekends when many establishments are the busiest, namely our bars and restaurants, as well as our special events like the farmers market and Friday Fest.

- **Cost and enforcement:** While the primary goal of a paid parking system is to encourage turnover of the most in demand spaces (on street parking), a secondary goal of the system is to prevent parking violations in a way the ultimately does not cost the taxpayer anything. A paid parking system like the one described in the Walker study would be managed and enforced by a private operator whose costs would be paid for by the revenue from the parking fees and while

the system would require initial investment by the city, once these initial costs are recouped (through revenue from the parking fees) the continuing cost of managing and enforcing the parking downtown would require no additional staff, vehicles or equipment to be provided and paid for by the city. In effect we would have enforcement that pays for itself.

In addition this could potentially free up existing code enforcement staff to focus their efforts on other enforcement needs within the city since they would no longer need to patrol the designated paid parking downtown.

- **Parking culture and inventory:** Downtown is growing. New businesses and new development like King's Landing will only put additional strain on our already insufficient parking inventory. Anyone who has come downtown on a Friday evening or during one of our events downtown can tell you that there is just not enough available parking. This causes people to drive around looking for spaces close to their destination or be forced to park blocks away. The fear is that this condition will drive people away downtown. In addition we have seen that the lack of convenient parking, coupled with not enough resources for enforcement, encourages people to park illegally on unsanctioned lots, rights of way or private property. The fact that this parking behavior is occurring on a regular basis is a clear indication that city needs more parking inventory and proper enforcement to encourage a culture of orderly and well regulated parking downtown.

A long term goal of the parking committee is to help create the opportunity and means for the city to add more parking inventory downtown (most likely in a structured multistory parking garage) located as close as possible to the most sought out destinations downtown. The parking committee has commissioned an additional study to determine the most feasible and cost-effective possible locations for new parking to be built. While the benefits and necessity of additional parking downtown are obvious, development of this scale would come at significant costs. An additional goal of a paid parking system would be to create a revenue stream that could be funneled into building additional parking saving the citizens at large the cost of paying for this development through increased ad valorem taxes or at the expense of other funded budget expenditures the city needs to serve it's citizens.

If we increase enforcement alone without increasing inventory, we will drive people away from downtown. To solve the parking issues downtown we must implement a better system of enforcement and increase inventory. The parking committee has considered different ways to accomplish this but the method which presents the greatest chance of success and which is expected to provide the best result for city with the lowest cost over the long term is a paid parking system.