

# **A Summary Concerning Missoula Parking Commission's Proposal to Restructure Downtown Parking Fines**

*Prepared by Missoula Downtown Association Staff with input from the MDA Board of Directors and Membership*

The MDA wants the community to be informed and educated. The following is a brief history on the why, how, and what involving the Missoula Parking Commission's proposal for the restructuring of parking fines:

Over the course of the last three years, great discussion has taken place concerning the future of Downtown Missoula. Things have changed dramatically with the sunset of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency (MRA) in District 1, as we no longer have a lead agency directing development. Additionally, without the \$3 million in tax-increment financing the MRA invested and managed in Downtown, organizations such as the Missoula Downtown Association, the Missoula Parking Commission (MPC) and the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) have been asked by government and private sector leaders to take on different and more expanded roles in Downtown's future. Some examples include implementation of the Downtown Streets Project, creation of a Downtown Master Plan, retention of municipal services in Downtown, development of the Riverfront Triangle, and general guidance concerning growth and development of our Downtown.

In response to these changes, all three of the aforementioned organizations are working toward filling the gap left by the MRA. The Missoula Downtown Association has taken on a stronger advocacy and leadership role. The Business Improvement District has accepted the responsibility of clean and safe programs, in addition to serving as the lead agency for the master planning process. The Missoula Parking Commission has accepted its expanded role of partnering with other entities for the development and management of additional parking.

In recent months, MPC has been asked by both the public and private sectors to be a partner in parking development with several projects Downtown: the creation of a new city police headquarters with a parking garage, the development of underground parking on the Riverfront Triangle (regardless of what development occurs there), the creation of a multiple-floor First Interstate Bank building with an adjacent parking structure, and the implementation of the Downtown Streets Project, which will increase on-street parking. The questions each MPC board member has asked are, "How do we prioritize which projects deserve MPC funding?", and "how can we participate as a partner in all of these projects?"

From the perspective of the MDA Board of Directors and others, MPC should be a development partner for each project. Like the MDA, the Parking Commission recognizes it cannot build all the parking alone, but it has the opportunity to leverage other investment in developing Downtown parking for Downtown customers, employees and business owners.

Therefore, in attempting to put itself in position to partner with all three projects, MPC fully evaluated its programs, funding sources, and potential bonding capacity, knowing that the community expects MPC to help build the Downtown economy through the addition of parking.

MPC essentially has three streams of revenue: meters, lease lots and fines. Meters were increased from \$.25 an hour to \$.50 in 2000 with great debate. Rates for lease spots have increased each year for the last six years. The fine structure was last modified in 1998. The first meter fine has remained at the same level (\$2) since 1971 or longer. Comparisons with Montana's six other large communities, as well as seven cities in the Rocky Mountain West, show Missoula's overall meter fines are the lowest.

MPC is proposing to increase meter fines for three reasons:

1. To increase revenue and bonding capacity to build more parking Downtown.
2. To discourage business owners and employees from parking at the meters, thus creating greater turnover, and promoting greater utilization of the off-street parking structures, the Downtown Park & Ride program, and the Mountain Line bus system.
3. To reduce the number of people who do not plug the meter because the \$2 ticket is not a deterrent.

Conservative estimates on ticketing and collection have indicated that MPC could potentially generate around \$180,000 per year with the proposed new fine rates. That would increase MPC's bonding capacity by \$2 million. Several suggestions for new rates have been discussed in recent months. The final proposal approved by the MPC Board of Directors will increase the meter fine from \$2 to \$5, the overtime fine from \$5 to \$10, and the improper parking fine from \$15 to \$20. The current tiered structure that increases fines for subsequent violations will be eliminated.

This MPC proposal has resulted in significant feedback from Downtown business owners, employees, and customers, both in favor of and against fine restructuring. Some business owners describe the \$2 fine as "customer friendly" and inviting. Others feel increasing the fine will be a deterrent for customers to come Downtown. The MDA has also received feedback stating an increase in the fine is "long overdue" and that "turning over on-street parking spaces is essential for all businesses in the district."

The MDA Board of Directors has been asked to endorse the MPC's proposed increase in fines. This decision is being weighed carefully by the board, as the MDA highly values Downtown development through financial and structural investment, yet does not want to diminish current Downtown vitality and business strength. Downtown Missoula boasts an ambience and charm that many cities cannot maintain when experiencing growth. The MDA Board desires that its members be proactive participants in this decision-making process to assure Downtown Missoula progresses and evolves in a way that promises current and future success.

To that end, the Missoula Downtown Association is hosting a public forum on April 17th from 7pm to 10pm at the Holiday Inn Parkside for the entire community of Missoula in an effort to obtain information, seek suggestions for improvement from the community, set priorities and make a recommendation to the Missoula Parking Commission. The MDA Board of Directors has a goal of finalizing this process by its May 1 Board Meeting. The results of the April 17 meeting will help the MDA Board craft a recommendation that will be forwarded to the MPC Board. Please note that the final decision for the Missoula Parking Commission's proposal will be made by the Missoula City Council.

For more information, please contact the MDA via phone (543-4238) or email ([mda@missouladowntown.com](mailto:mda@missouladowntown.com)) if you have questions or concerns.