

TO: Library Renovation Council Subcommittee and Salem City Council

FROM: Salem Public Library Advisory Board

Subject: Parking policies at Salem Main Library

Recommendation:

The Library Advisory Board urges your support for our unanimous recommendation for 3 hours free parking during library hours Monday-Saturday until 6pm, free parking on evenings after 6pm, and free parking all day Sunday*.

The Library Advisory Board asserts that this recommendation will be celebrated by the Salem community and is a unique opportunity to increase access to our newly renovated and improved main library when it reopens in 2021.

Issue:

Parking Fees are a barrier to patrons of the Salem Main Library. 88% of the respondents to the City-sponsored Orange Boy survey in 2018 indicated free parking was the one thing that would increase their library use. Elimination of parking fees was repeatedly brought up during community meetings on the Salem Library renovation project.

One of the values stated in the **Salem Public Library Strategic Plan** is “to provide free and equal access to library resources and facilities to people from all walks of life.”

The American Library Association Library Bill of Rights advocates examining and eliminating barriers to library access. This access includes economic barriers as well as physical ones.

Facts and Findings:

Why is free parking so important?

Poverty rates in Salem were rising even before COVID-19 - and have surged.

Data from the 2018 report showed a citywide rate of 12.6% of households in poverty.

A breakdown by ward gives a more accurate picture:

2018 Household Poverty rates:

- Wards 1 and 2, 17%
- Ward 5, 27%
- Ward 6, 20%

Educational levels mirror the poverty rates most dramatically in Ward 5 and Ward 6 with 12% of households achieving higher education versus 44% in Ward 7 which has a 6% poverty rate.

19 Salem elementary schools, all middle schools, and McKay and North Salem High schools are Title 1 schools with free lunch.

For impoverished households, many times there is no discretionary money. If there is no money to pay the meter and a fine is imposed then again there is no money to pay the ticket, fines, and the household could risk car impoundment. These are households without credit cards and other advantages that many take for granted.

Parity with other area libraries and parking districts is also worth considering. West Salem Branch Library and all other CCRLS (Chemeketa Cooperative Regional Library Service) libraries have free parking as does Beaverton, Hillsboro, Ashland, Lincoln City, and Lake Oswego among others. Springfield Library currently has 3 hours free parking.

Downtown Salem and the new Police Station will have 3 hour free parking. Why not the library?

The Library Advisory Board voted for signage (similar to that in the adjacent downtown area parking) rather than the installation of kiosks. The new kiosk technology could present added challenges and confusion to our diverse Salem community. The cost of the kiosks is \$12,000 each, but “the cost of maintenance is unknown” (Strahl).

The library staff recommendation is for 90 minutes free parking. Many programs, library activities, civic organization use, and city meetings are longer than 90 minutes, which would necessitate a fee.

Summary:

The Library Advisory Board voted unanimously for a 3 hour free parking option for the newly renovated parking structure. We recommend this option as one that provides additional access to the library for all patrons and will increase usage.

In addition, the Library Advisory Board would support a transparent analysis of the revenues collected from parking, the library’s obligations to reimburse revenues to the General Fund, and related budget details.

*LAB proposal recommends starting the free time when the library opens, rather than at 8AM.

**Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Master Fee Schedule, page 109.