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The meters in the Garfield parking lot will soon be replaced by a pay box, and drivers also will be able to use a parking app on their smartphones to pay and add time. The lot's rate will increase to $1 an hour with the enhancements, part of larger vision to better manage the village's downtown parking inventory. (Jim Slonoff photo)

Village targets Garfield lot in move to ease downtown parking crunch

By Ken Knutson
kknutson@thehinsdalean.com

Don't use that smartphone when driving, but the device could soon become an indispensable tool when parking in Hinsdale's downtown business district.

At the village's zoning and public safety committee meeting July 28, officials gave the green light to a recommendation to equip the parking lot on Garfield Street with a single pay box in lieu of individual meters, and parking app capability.

Those using the lot, however, will have to pay $1 per hour, four times the previous rate. A fine for a violation would be increased from $5 to $25. App users will be notified when their time is about to expire and be able to purchase more time if desired.

Hinsdale Police Chief Brad Bloom said the parking app is already being used in village commuter lots with great success.

"Our hope is that we're going to have a lot of regular users use the parking app. And if they use the parking app, they don't have to visit the pay box," he said. "Because we're seeing so much use of the app in the commuter lots, it's kind of raised our level of confidence (that downtown visitors would use it)."

The proposal was spurred by the findings of a parking study by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. The grant-funded study revealed, among other things, that those using downtown parking should have more options regarding payment and length of use, and that as much as 30 percent of prime spaces at any given time were taken up by downtown employees.

Hiking the parking rate is hoped, in part, to steer those employees to permitted parking areas or free spaces on the periphery of the business district. The proposal includes creating about 15 spaces on Symonds Drive for such employees to use.

Trustee Kim Angelo asked about the possibility of instituting the rate change in the 42-space Garfield lot but waiting on the installing the pay box.

Bloom said that by accepting various forms of payment, the pay box frees drivers from the coin-only meters.

"They're looking for something more convenient because they just don't carry that much change with them," Bloom said, noting that the pay boxes are solar-powered and allow people to pay in time increments of 15 minutes.

If the Garfield lot experiment is successful, pay boxes — and the app — could eventually replace meters throughout the downtown, he said.

"If we have a high percent of people using the app at the pay box, there's a good chance that we can use the pay box to replace the meters and not have to use so many pay boxes," Bloom said.

Angelo said the app would be especially useful in the winter and praised village staff for this first step in parking enhancements.

"It's really well coordinated, the whole thought process. You can see it working," he said.

"The goal ultimately is to have a system that promotes parking availability for shoppers," Bloom said.

Following CMAP's recommendation, fees collected as a result the increased parking rate will be set aside for central business district projects.

The initial cost for the pay box is $12,710, with an annual service fee of $1,800. It is expected to installed by Sept. 1.