



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

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Meeting Date: April 5, 2007

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets
FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services
SUBJECT: Review of Parking Meter Exemptions

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT parking meter exemption decals be issued by the General Manager of Engineering Services to the following recipients only:
- i. City/Park Board staff vehicles on City/Park Board business with a three hour time limit,
 - ii. City and Park Board elected officials,
 - iii. People with severe disabilities (who are unable to handle coins or a cell phone) for which they are the principal operator of a vehicle with a three hour time limit,
 - iv. Freedom of the City recipients for one vehicle registered to them with no time limit.
 - v. Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly who hold seats in Vancouver ridings for one vehicle registered to them with a three hour time limit.
- B. THAT the provision of parking meter exemption decals to all other previous recipients be discontinued and replaced by the pay-by-phone system which provides similar conveniences.
- C. THAT the net increase in parking meter revenues estimated at approximately \$41,000 in 2007 be added to Contingency Reserve, and that the net increase in parking meter revenues estimated at approximately \$151,000 in 2008 be added to the operating budget without offset.

GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The General Manager of Engineering Services RECOMMENDS approval of A, B and C.

COUNCIL POLICY

Council policy is to install parking meters, with the support of businesses, to improve turnover of street parking for short term users.

Council authorizes the provision of parking meter exemptions.

SUMMARY

A review of the parking meter exemption decal program was undertaken because of the introduction of the pay-by-phone system. The review found that the pay-by-phone system is a good replacement for the parking meter exemption decal for the news media and all senior government agencies. The pay-by-phone system provides similar conveniences plus additional functionality for users including the provision of receipts. It would also help resolve many current issues related to the exemption decal program. This includes inequity among all organizations or agencies, abuse of the decals, and administrative difficulties. For City/Park Board staff and elected officials, people with severe disabilities, Freedom of the City recipients, and MP's and MLA's in Vancouver ridings, it is recommended that the parking exemption decal program be retained at this time with some minor modifications.

The conversion to the pay-by-phone system is consistent with the City's sustainability objectives because the elimination of the exemption decals is essentially eliminating a parking subsidy. The increased parking cost to users may encourage them to reduce their vehicle usage. Some current users who pay for the exemption decal may see a decrease in cost depending upon their usage of parking meters. Overall, there is the potential for a net annual revenue increase of approximately \$151,000 from parking meters with the recommended conversion to the pay-by-phone system.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to review the parking meter exemption program in light of the new pay-by-phone system implemented in 2006.

BACKGROUND

Parking meter exemptions have long been issued for those functions that are essential to the operation of the City. The number of eligible recipients and any fees charged has changed over time as established by Council.

In the 1960's, parking meter exemptions were issued to government vehicles (City or otherwise), to vehicles conducting enforcement related activities, to City staff who used their vehicles on City business, and to people who are granted Freedom of the City. Due to the impact on the availability of short term parking and the difficulty in controlling the use of the

meter exemptions by non-City government agencies, Council rescinded the general provision of exemptions to non-City government agencies in 1964. At that time, Council also adopted a policy of providing exemption permits, in special cases of need, to people with severe disabilities.

Since then, Council has received many requests from government agencies, organizations, and businesses for parking meter exemptions. These have been reviewed from time to time and Council has consistently reaffirmed its standing policy. Most recently in 1999, Council reaffirmed the provision of parking meter exemptions to MP's and MLA's who held seats in Vancouver ridings, to those persons who were granted Freedom of the City, and to the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board and BC Assessment on a negotiated cost-recovery basis. In addition, Council approved the continued issuance of parking meter exemptions to the news media on approval by the Mayor's Office.

In 2004, as requested by the Mayor's Office, staff assumed responsibility of approving parking meter exemption requests from the news media.

In June 2006, the City introduced a new pay-by-phone system for paying parking meters.

DISCUSSION

In 2006, 1,712 parking exemption decals were issued to various recipients as per Council policy (see table below). Most decals are provided at no cost, except that the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the BC Assessment Authority, and the BC Corrections Branch receive them for \$420 per decal.

Parking Meter Exemptions Issued in 2006

City/Park Board Staff and Elected Officials	807
Senior Government Staff	560
Disability Program	182
News Media	133
Special Recognition Recipients	30
Total Exemptions Issued	1,712

With the recent successful implementation of the pay-by-phone system, the parking meter exemption decal program was reviewed to see where it could be replaced by the pay-by-phone system. There are two general categories of recipients. The first category includes those who require decals for direct City-related operations; those who require them out of absolute necessity (e.g. severely disabled) and those who are provided them in special recognition (e.g. Freedom of the City, Vancouver MP's and Vancouver MLA's). The second category of recipients includes those who receive them largely for the convenience and/or cost savings (e.g. news media, senior government staff engaged in enforcement functions, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, BC Assessment Authority, BC Corrections Branch and the Police Board).

A review of the first category of recipients suggests that they should continue to receive meter exemption decals at this time. The vast majority of these decals are issued to City and Park Board staff vehicles for use while on City/Park Board business. The City has direct

control and management over the issuance and use of these decals by staff and therefore is more able to limit misuse. As well, a conversion at this time to the pay-by-phone system will increase City costs due to financial transaction costs. The decals issued to people with severe disabilities (unable to handle coins or a cell phone) are also appropriate because without the decals, they would be unable to park in a metered location. Provision of this "disability" exemption decal is based on accessibility needs and not economic reasons. A review of all current recipients is recommended to ensure that they are the principal operator of a vehicle and require the exemption for accessibility reasons. In keeping with the intent of parking meters for short term parking, the unlimited time limit provided by the current disability exemption decal is proposed to be changed to a three hour time limit. The decals provided to Freedom of the City recipients, Vancouver MP'S and Vancouver MLA's in special recognition will continue to be on approval from Council.

For the second category of recipients, the pay-by-phone system would be a good replacement. An overview of the second category is provided below for background.

News Media Exemption Decal

- 133 decals were issued in 2006.
- There is no established criterion for issuing decals to the media and this has led to inequities among media outlets:
 - Not all media outlets receive the decals.
 - The number of decals issued to each media outlet varies.
 - Not all media outlets with decals are based in Vancouver.
 - The reporting of civic business by the media outlet varies significantly.
- There are increasing requests for the decals from existing and new media outlets.
- Decals issued to the media cannot be easily scrutinized by staff and therefore, could be more prone to misuse.
- All media outlets, except CBC, are private businesses.
- Reporters and camera operators tend to go from story to story throughout the day so they would generally spend less than the two hour limit at any one meter. If they require longer term parking to cover bigger news story they should be parking off-street.
- Cost savings and convenience are the two main advantages cited by media personnel for having the meter exemption.
- None of the municipalities contacted (Burnaby, North Vancouver, Richmond, New Westminister, Victoria and Toronto) give any special parking privileges to the media.

Senior Government Exemption Decals

- 560 decals were issued in 2006.
- Agencies receiving the decal include the BC Assessment Authority (BCA), BC Corrections Branch (BCCB), BC Ministry of Small Business and Revenue, Canada Border Services Agency, Canada Revenue Agency, the Police Board, and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA).
- The BCA, BCCB and the VCHA pay \$420 per decal, while all other agencies or individuals receive them at no cost.
- There are no established limits to the maximum number of decals issued to each agency.

- There are numerous requests for decals by other senior government agencies, but only those conducting enforcement related activities (as best determined by staff) are approved.
- As an example, many problems have arisen with VCHA exemption holders using the exemptions to park for several hours around the Health Units located in parking metered areas. In some cases parking is not provided at Health Offices for employees and the exemption decal is being misused as an alternative to supplying off-street parking for employees. As some of these offices are located in busy commercial areas, short-term on-street parking for legitimate customers of nearby businesses becomes inaccessible.
- The Police Board receives exemption decals despite the fact that none are issued to any volunteer members of other City special advisory committees or boards.
- Decals issued to the various government agencies cannot be easily scrutinized by staff and therefore could be misused.
- Cost savings and convenience are again the two main advantages cited by recipients.

Based on the observations above, the replacement of the parking meter exemption decal with the pay-by-phone system for news media and all senior government agencies is recommended for the following reasons:

- Maintains the primary intent of the parking meter exemption program (for City staff vehicles while on City business).
- The pay-by-phone system offers a similar level of convenience by not having to look for change plus some additional functionality such as a call-back or text message reminder prior to the expiration of the meter and the ability to purchase more time remotely by phone.
- The pay-by-phone system permits users to track their use and receive receipts; this is particularly useful for business users. As well companies are afforded greater control and monitoring of their parking costs.
- Promotes an equitable user-pay system accessible to all media outlets and all senior government agencies or organizations. The current system is particularly unfair to those that currently pay for their decal.
- Reduces administrative difficulties in processing and scrutinizing requests for exemption decals.
- Consistent with the City's general response to requests for free parking from many other organizations (motorcyclists, people with disabilities, seniors, veterans, volunteer organizations, and other government agencies).
- Eliminates the abuse of the exemption decals which has been observed in many instances.
- Potentially increases the availability of short-term parking for the general public.
- Eliminates a parking subsidy which is consistent with the City's sustainability objectives of promoting alternative forms of transportation over the automobile.
- Encourages better transportation management by each agency or organization.

CONSULTATIONS

All news media outlets currently receiving the parking meter exemption decals were advised of the potential elimination of the program. Of those that were consulted about their need to have an exemption decal, almost all cited convenience and cost savings as the primary

factors. There were concerns expressed by the television stations that their microwave trucks do not fit in underground parkades, however, this is not a factor unless they are covering a story that requires parking for more than the two hour parking meter time limit. In those circumstances, special parking arrangements can be made with our Film and Special Events Branch.

Other groups expressed concern about the changes to the current program and felt that their particular organization was deserving of retaining the exemption decals. For those that previously received the exemption decal at no cost, their parking cost will increase. For those that previously paid for the exemption decal, their parking cost may increase or decrease depending upon their frequency of use.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial impact to the City is highly dependent on the usage of the 693 exemption decals issued to the news media and senior government agencies. Since the use of these decals is not tracked, the increase in parking meter revenues from the elimination of the exemption decals cannot be determined with accuracy. Meter revenues have the potential to increase in the order of \$329,000 per year, prorated to \$219,000 for 2007. This is offset by the annual loss of \$178,000 in revenues from the sale of some of the decals. The net revenue to the City from parking meters has the potential to be \$41,000 in 2007 (to be added to the 2007 Contingency Reserve) and \$151,000 in subsequent years (to be added to the 2008 operating budget without offset). The table below summarizes the impact to the 2007 and 2008 budget.

	2007	2008
Potential Meter Revenues	\$219,000	\$329,000
Loss of Decal Revenues	\$178,000	\$178,000
Net Potential Revenues	\$41,000	\$151,000

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The elimination of the parking meter exemption decal (a parking subsidy) is consistent with the City's sustainability objectives of promoting alternative forms of transportation over the automobile. The elimination of the exemption decal may encourage a reduction in vehicle usage by those impacted.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

All parking meter exemption decals expire annually on April 30th. It is proposed that the parking exemption decals for news media and all senior government not be renewed this year after April 30th. City staff and Verrus (the pay-by-phone provider) will work closely with all affected people to help them transition to the pay-by-phone system. The City and Verrus will provide additional support to new users where necessary through special introductory meetings or events. It is anticipated that all current exemption decal recipients can be accommodated with the pay-by-phone system. In cases of extraordinary circumstances, other

parking services offered by the City may be utilized or some special modifications to the pay-by-phone system may be made.

CONCLUSION

Parking exemptions were previously issued to select outside organizations and agencies as a courtesy for their convenience. The replacement of the parking meter exemption decal with the pay-by-phone system for all news media and senior government agencies is recommended for the following reasons:

- It is more equitable for all parking meter users, particularly to those that currently pay a fee for the decals.
- It provides a similar level of convenience plus some additional functionality.
- It eliminates misuse of the exemption decals.
- It is consistent with the City's sustainability objectives.
- It reduces administrative difficulties in determining eligibility.

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