



REPORT

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Contact: Lon LaClaire
Contact No.: 604-873-7336
RTS No.: 14102
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: October 22, 2020
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TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services

FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Year-Round Free Parking Subsidy for Veterans and Current Serving Members of the Canadian Forces

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT no additional free parking provisions be granted to vehicles displaying veteran plates or identified as vehicles belonging to current serving members of the Canadian Forces;
- B. THAT Council remove the current provisions for free parking for veterans during the week leading up to Remembrance Day (retaining Remembrance Day) from 2021 onwards;
- C. THAT Council request that staff report back with a recommended City Policy that will guide future requests for free or subsidized parking for individuals or members of organizations; and,
- D. THAT Council direct the City Manager to inform the Vancouver Park Board of Council's decisions on free parking provisions for veterans or current serving members of the Canadian Forces so that they can consider similar actions for Park Board controlled facilities.

CONSIDERATIONS

- A. THAT vehicles displaying veteran licence plates be exempted from parking meter fees on April 9 (Anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge), June 6 (Anniversary of D-Day), and November 4 to 11 (Remembrance Week), subject to time limits, at all on-street metered parking areas or at City-owned off-street parking facilities.

or

- B. THAT a system to provide limited free parking to vehicles belonging to Vancouver residents who are low-income veterans or current serving members of the Canadian Forces be brought forward to Council for approval as part of the 2021 budgeting process.

or

- C. THAT a system to provide limited free parking to vehicles belonging to Vancouver residents who are veterans or current serving members of the Canadian Forces be brought forward for approval as part of the 2021 budgeting process; and

FURTHER THAT vehicles displaying veteran licence plates be exempted from parking meter fees from November 4, 2020 until December 31, 2020, subject to time limits, at all on-street metered parking areas or at City-owned off-street parking facilities.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

On October 18, 2007, Council declared that vehicles displaying veteran license plates be exempted from parking meter fees from November 4 to 11, 2007, and the same week each year thereafter.

On November 26, 2019, Council requested staff to explore and report back on a process to allow eligible holders of a BC veterans license plate and current serving members of the Canadian Forces to park their vehicle for free, subject to the time limits already in place, at City of Vancouver parking meters, Easy Park lots, surface lots, and Park Board operated parking facilities; including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the Vancouver Aquatic Centre, and all Vancouver Community Centres. At this time, Council also directed staff to report back with plans and recommendations to deliver a process by November 11, 2020 for year-round free parking for veterans and current serving members of the Canadian Forces.

In accordance with the *Vancouver Charter* and by-laws enacted under it, changes to parking rules within parks require Park Board approval.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Celebrating veterans, people who risked their lives for the safety and security of all Canadians, and their contributions is important and is currently done in a number of ways: Remembrance Day ceremonies, monuments (such as the braziers on the Burrard Bridge, or the Chinatown Memorial Monument), and declarations.

However, we have many concerns about subsidizing parking for veterans. It incentivizes driving as a way to travel, which is in direct opposition to our climate change and transportation policies. It interferes with our strategy to manage street space through pricing tools. It does not support veterans who travel in other ways, such as by transit, walking, or cycling. Veterans are not, in general, a low-income or disadvantaged group, so this does not advance key equity goals and not charging for parking would not support low-income veterans, many of whom may

not be able to afford a vehicle. Depending on the direction given by Council, it may also be costly and reduce City revenues.

Based on this, staff do not recommend that this policy move forward and would suggest that Council direct staff to look for other ways to honour our veterans. If this were to include financial benefits for veterans' travel, staff would suggest it could be in the form of a grant to a veterans' organization. However if Council chooses to cover the cost of parking for veterans, this report contains some considerations to move forward.

REPORT

Background/Context

On November 26, 2019, Council directed staff to report back by October 2020 with recommendations and plans to provide free parking for veterans at City parking meters, Easy Park lots, surface lots, and Park Board operated parking facilities, including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the Vancouver Aquatic Centre, and all Vancouver Community Centres. This motion can be found in Appendix A.

Council should note that the jurisdiction to impact fees on Park sites falls to the Vancouver Park Board. Accordingly, approval to provide free parking on those sites has not been considered in this report.

Currently, veterans are exempted from on-street parking meter fees during Remembrance Week, which occurs from November 4 to November 11 each year. These privileges were established by Council in October 2007. The staff report at that time recommended that on-street parking be free of charge for veterans only on November 11 of each year.

The proposal for free year-round parking for veterans would be significantly larger than any other exemption offered by the City. As of October 2018, approximately 57,000 veteran's plates have been issued in BC¹. Not every veteran currently has a veteran licence plate, however, so there is the potential for additional growth.

Just under 2% of the population of BC (90,000 people) has veteran status²; assuming the distribution of veterans is equal across the province, this equates to approximately 48,000 veterans in Metro Vancouver and 12,000 in Vancouver. Eighty percent of veterans are under the age of 80 and are still likely to be driving. In Canada, there are approximately 100,000 people currently serving in Canada as a part of a Regular or Reserve Force. This number does not include family members or close friends, who could also use this privilege, as there is no practical way to limit use. This could easily double or triple the effective exemption.

¹ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/121/2018/10/Veterans-Licence-Plate-Engagement-Report.pdf>, accessed October 8, 2020

² <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/news-media/facts-figures>, accessed October 8, 2020

Strategic Analysis

Providing free parking provisions to certain subsets of the population does not align with current transportation and equity objectives, has financial impacts, and is inconsistent with policies of other large urban centres.

Long-standing transportation policy has been to prioritize walking, cycling, transit and shared vehicles over the use of private automobiles. The Greenest City Action Plan, Transportation 2040 and most recently the Climate Emergency Response all set mode share targets to increase the number of trips taken by sustainable modes. Providing free parking would encourage driving as a mode of transportation, which is counter to the City's transportation and climate goals.

The City is actively working on a number of initiatives to create a more equitable Vancouver. However, there is no clear financial need for free parking for veterans – according to a 2016 Veteran Affairs Canada Life After Service Survey³, 4% of veterans experienced low income; this was lower than Canadians of comparable age and sex (14%). Current Serving Military members of the Canadian Forces are remunerated for their service. In addition, if free parking is provided to veterans and active service members on a year-round basis, a significant precedent will be set. Other groups that serve the community could make a case to receive similar privileges. This could include current and retired firefighters, police, frontline healthcare workers and teachers, who are all known for their service and sacrifice to the community. Council could face pressure from other groups as a result of this change and granting further exemptions to other groups will exacerbate the issues.

Providing free parking to veterans and active service members is anticipated to have a significant financial impact to the City. Assuming that veteran use of vehicles is similar to that of the general population, and due to the attractiveness of this benefit, forgone revenue of a fully implemented, unlimited use program as proposed by Council's motion is approximately \$2M per year. This would not include any additional resources required to administer the program. Given the considerable financial pressures that the City is facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a benefit of this significance will make it more difficult to meet many short-term (e.g. the immediate support of small businesses impacted by the pandemic) and long-term goals (e.g. Climate Emergency Response).

Current parking privileges for veterans are consistent with other large urban centres, with exemptions either limited by specific date (similar to what is already offered in Vancouver) or value (set number of hours or dollars per year). While free parking for veterans is provided in a few communities (See Appendix B), if free parking were granted to all holders of veteran plates and active service members on an unlimited basis in Vancouver, it would likely be the most beneficial program in all of Canada. In addition, there are no known municipal free parking programs for current serving members of the Canadian Forces.

As staff and Council will continue to receive requests for free or subsidized parking from various groups, staff recommend that more formal policy regarding the granting of these privileges be brought forward to Council to appropriately guide future conversations.

³ <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/about-vac/research/research-directorate/publications/reports/lass-2016> , accessed October 8, 2020

Consideration

Should Council wish to provide free year-round parking privileges, a number of options exist that strive to balance the spirit of the motion passed by Council last year with its many other policies and objectives.

Consideration A – Additional Free Parking on Days of Military Significance

When examining the programs from other communities across Canada, staff observed that some communities provide additional free parking privileges on days of historic military significance. Following this practice, the City could subsidize parking for veterans on the anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge (April 9) and the Anniversary of D-Day (June 6). In future years, if there are days of significance of particular importance to local veterans, they can be brought forward for Council's consideration.

This action is a symbolic gesture directly related to our military history; however, given the scope of the days where free parking is provided is limited, there would be reduced impact on City revenues, the incentive to use a private vehicle would be limited, and there would be no additional administrative costs. This option would only be available to vehicles with veteran licence plates.

Consideration B – Limited Free Parking to Low-Income Veterans and Active Service Members

Drawing from the City's Healthy City Strategy, this option proposes to only offer free parking privileges to veterans and active service members that have low-income. To determine if an individual has low-income status, a means test similar to what is required to participate in the Park Board's Leisure Access Pass Program will be administered. At this time, the annual net family income thresholds for one person and two person households is \$25,516 and \$36,084, respectively. Active service members in the Regular Forces will likely not qualify, however, members of the Reserve Forces may, depending on their other employment outside of military service.

To limit the amount of driving encouraged by this action as well as the financial impact to the City, this option would provide qualifying applicants with a set number of free parking hours for use each year. This would be administered using single use scratch cards that require no special technology to operate. Also, as this subsidy would be funded by City of Vancouver taxpayers, the program would only be available to City of Vancouver residents.

To administer this program, at least 0.25 full-time equivalents (FTE) of additional staff at an Office Support Clerk level will be required. The lost meter revenue as part of this option is not anticipated to exceed \$25,000 per year.

Should Council wish to pursue this option, staff will bring forward the final details of the program for approval as part of the 2021 budgeting process.

Consideration C – Limited Free Parking to all Veterans and Active Service Members

To limit the amount of driving encouraged by this action as well as the financial impact to the City, this option would provide veterans and active service members that are residents of Vancouver with a set number of free parking hours for use each year. This would be administered using single use scratch cards that require no special technology to operate. The

City of Winnipeg provides free veteran parking in this manner and gives veterans 20 hours of free parking per year.

To administer this program, at least two FTE of additional staff at an Office Support Clerk level will be required. The lost meter revenue as part of this option may be in the range of \$200,000 - \$500,000 per year, dependent upon program uptake.

Should Council wish to pursue this option, staff will bring forward the final details of the program for approval as part of the 2021 budgeting process. An interim measure for this option would be to allow all veterans plates to have free parking until the end of this year. This may result in up to \$50,000 in forgone revenue in 2020.

Financial

If Council proceeds with staff's recommendations or Consideration A, there are negligible financial impacts.

If Council proceeds with Consideration B, the financial impact may be up to \$25,000 per year in forgone revenue from the City's metered parking revenues and contributions to the Property Endowment Fund from EasyPark operations. There will also be \$15,000 per year in staffing and program material costs.

If Council proceeds with Consideration C, the financial impact may be up to \$50,000 of forgone revenue in 2020 and between \$200,000 to \$500,000 in forgone revenue in future years. Similar to Consideration B, this forgone revenue would be from the City's metered parking revenues and contributions to the Property Endowment Fund from EasyPark operations. If Consideration C is chosen, there will be an additional \$150,000 per year in staffing and program material costs.

Foregone revenue must be offset by a property tax increase or reduction in city service levels to ensure that the budget remains balanced. A \$2M impact to revenues would equate to an additional property tax increase of 0.2%.

Legal

Council may differentiate between classes of vehicles, and can exempt different classes of vehicles from parking fees.

CONCLUSION

Staff do not recommend that Council provide additional free parking to veterans or to active service members of the Canadian Forces for the following reasons:

- The current exemption is consistent with other major urban centres;
- A veterans' exemption would not align with current policy objectives around transportation options or effective management of curbside space;
- A full exemption for veterans and active service members could result in up to \$2M per year in forgone revenue; and
- Veterans are not, on average, economically disadvantaged, so this does not support equity for historically disadvantaged communities.

Should Council still wish to pursue this action, staff have presented three potential options for Council's consideration that provide varying levels of parking benefit to veterans and active service members. Should Council wish to pursue Consideration B or C, the final program approval will be brought back to Council as part of the 2021 budgeting process.

* * * * *

Council Motion from November 2019

At a meeting of the Council of the City of Vancouver held on Tuesday, Tuesday, November 26, 2019, the following motions were approved:

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver issued an Information Bulletin on November 1, 2019, stating that all vehicles with BC veteran license plates will be exempt from parking fees from November 4 to 11 to mark Veterans' Week. The reasons included: "to recognize the service and dedication of Canadian military personnel to our country";
2. For many years the City of Vancouver has offered free parking on Remembrance Day and during Veterans Week for vehicles with valid BC Veteran License Plates parked at City of Vancouver parking meters, Easy Park lots, surface lots, and Park Board operated parking facilities; including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the Vancouver Aquatic Centre, and all Vancouver community centres;
3. The City of Surrey carried policy recommendations in a report dated November 3, 2008, to adopt as a policy that vehicles bearing a "veteran" license plate be granted complimentary parking on a year round basis at all City of Surrey on street parking meters";
 - i) The report and recommendations in the report titled Complimentary Parking for Veterans at On-Street Parking Meters in Surrey, states that in analysis of previous data, allowing Veterans to Park for free at on-street parking meters, when comparing to subsequent years "there was no significant impact on parking meter revenues";
4. Examples of other municipalities across Canada and their commitment to providing free parking for veterans include:
 - i) The City of Red Deer: The City provides a parking pass program for Veterans (plates issued by all provinces). This program is administered by the Canadian Legion and is free of charge to the Veteran unless a replacement hang tag is required and then \$20 is charged by the City. The passes are good for five years and then must be re-applied for. This pass allows the Veteran to park at a street parking meter for the time restriction in that area. With the Legion's administration, they ensure that the person is a Veteran and is responsible for verification of any documentation;
 - ii) The City of Regina, Saskatchewan allows a veteran to park at a meter if they have a valid, properly displayed Veteran Design License Plate issued by the Saskatchewan Government Insurance or the equivalent in other provinces in Canada;
 - iii) The City of White Rock offers four hours a day of free parking in pay parking areas for all veteran plates; Council Meeting Minutes, November 26, 2019

- iv) The City of London, Ontario: Holders of a veteran's license plate can park at any on-street meter without depositing coins for the limit of the meter;
5. The ICBC website states "In recognition our Canadian veterans, we've created a special plate to honour your service." It lists the following requirements for eligibility for veterans plates in B.C. as follows: You are eligible to apply for veteran license plates if you own or lease an eligible vehicle, and were honourably discharged from, or are currently serving in one of the following:
- i) WWII, Korea, Gulf War, the Balkan Wars, Afghanistan, or other UN Peacekeeping Missions as a member of:
 - The Canadian Armed Forces, or
 - An Allied Force, or
 - The Canadian or Allied War Time Merchant Navy
 - ii) A member of the Canadian Armed Forces, Regular or Reserves, who successfully completed basic training
 - iii) UN or NATO Operations as a member of:
 - The Canadian Armed Forces, or
 - A UN or NATO Alliance Force serving in an Operation with the Canadian Armed Forces
 - iv) Similarly qualified member of a British Commonwealth of Nations Armed Force who are honourably discharged. Unfortunately, currently serving members are not eligible.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to explore the possibility of a process to allow eligible holders of a BC veterans license plate and current serving members of the Canadian Forces to park their vehicle for free, subject to the time limits already in place, at City of Vancouver parking meters, Easy Park lots, surface lots, and Park Board operated parking facilities; including Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, the Vancouver Aquatic Centre, and all Vancouver Community Centres;

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to report back to Council by October 2020 with recommendations and plans to deliver a process by November 11, 2020, for year-round free parking for Veterans and current serving members of the Canadian Forces, at all parking locations currently offered by the City of Vancouver during the week of Remembrance Day

Parking Exemptions for Veterans in Other Cities

Major Urban Centres

City	Free Parking for Veterans?	Notes
Calgary, AB	Yes - Value Limited	With a valid plate free credit of \$10 / month of parking credit
Edmonton, AB	No	-
Montreal, QC	No	-
Halifax, NS	No	Free parking granted up until March 31, 2006 in recognition of Year of the Veteran in 2005.
Ottawa, ON	Yes - Date Limited	Free on Nov 11 (downtown)
Toronto, ON	Yes - Date Limited	Free on June 6, Sept 17, and Nov 11
Vancouver, BC	Yes - Date Limited	One week leading up to November 11
Winnipeg, MB	Yes - Value Limited	Free on April 9, June 6, Nov 11 and receive 20 hrs of complimentary free parking at meters (Scratch card)

Smaller Municipalities

City	Free Parking for Veterans?	Notes
Burnaby, BC	No	-
Fredericton, NB	No	-
Kingston, ON	No	-
Regina, SK	Yes	-
Red Deer, AB	Yes	-
Richmond, BC	Yes	Free parking year round for veterans that reside in Richmond
Surrey, BC	Yes	Free parking year round for veterans
Waterloo, ON	No	-
White Rock, BC	Yes	Free parking for 4 hours a day for all veteran plates in pay parking areas