

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 8, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 87 : HANDICAP PARKING POLICY

This memorandum is in response to Councilman Wilson's request for information on policies and practices relating to handicap parking in metered spaces, specifically on waivers of parking fees and maximum time limits for vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards. This memorandum summarizes applicable law and current area practices, and initial findings of staff field observations.

Applicable State Law

The Code of Virginia § 46.2-1245 establishes a uniform statewide exemption for vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards of (1) up four hours in time-restricted parking zones or metered spaces, and (2) from payment of parking meter fees, but permits local jurisdictions to set aside these exemptions by ordinance.

§ 46.2-1245. Four hours free parking in time-restricted or metered spaces: local option.

A. The disabled person, vehicle owner, or volunteer for an institution or organization to which disabled parking license plates, organizational removable windshield placards, permanent windshield placards, or temporary removable windshield placards are issued or any person to whom disabled parking license plates have been issued under subsection B of § 46.2-739 shall be allowed to park the vehicle on which such license plates or placards are displayed for up to four hours in metered or unmetered parking zones restricted as to length of parking time permitted and shall be exempted from paying parking meter fees of any county, city, or town.

B. This section shall not apply to any local ordinance which creates zones where stopping, standing, or parking is prohibited, or which creates parking zones for special types of vehicles, nor shall it apply to any local ordinance which prohibits parking during heavy traffic periods, during specified rush hours, or where parking would clearly present a traffic hazard.

C. The governing body of any county, city, or town may by ordinance provide that this section shall not apply within the boundaries of such county, city, or town. Any county, city, or town adopting an ordinance pursuant to this subsection shall indicate

by signs or other reasonable notice that the provisions of this section do not apply in such county, city, or town.

Area Practices

In Alexandria, vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards are exempted from parking fees and meter time limits.

In 1998, Arlington County adopted an “All may park, All must pay” policy. Under this policy, the same hourly rate is charged to all customers, including vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards. By using iPark devices (personal electronic prepaid parking meters that can be used in lieu of depositing payments directly into parking meters), handicap parkers may park for twice as long at a meter than the general public.

The District of Columbia allows vehicles displaying District-issued handicap license plates or placards to park in metered spaces for double the meter time limit at no charge (i.e. at a meter with a 2-hour time limit, may park free for four hours). No exemptions are provided for vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards that are not issued by the District of Columbia (i.e., Virginia and Maryland residents).

In Montgomery County, vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards may park in metered spaces for double the meter time limit or four hours, whichever is less, without payment.

In Baltimore, vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards may park in metered spaces for double the meter time limit or four hours, whichever is less, without payment. Baltimore also offers an EZPark meter, similar in function to Arlington’s iPark device.

Fairfax County and the Cities of Fairfax and Falls Church do not have metered on-street parking.

Findings of Initial Field Observations

To estimate the fiscal impact of Alexandria’s free handicap parking policy, field surveys were conducted in the Carlyle parking meter district (District 3), specifically on Jamieson Avenue between Holland Lane and Courthouse Square, on Ballenger Street between Holland Lane and Courthouse Square, on John Carlyle between Eisenhower Avenue and Duke Street, and on Dulany Street between Duke Street and the James Madison Building. This area currently contains 261 metered parking spaces. Between March 9th and 12th, staff observed the total number of metered spaces that were occupied and the number that were occupied by vehicles displaying handicap license plates or placards. These surveys were conducted during the week between the hours of 9:00 and 11:00 AM, and 2:00 and 4:00 PM in order to reflect typical weekday conditions in the Carlyle area.

The findings of this survey are summarized below.

- Percent of parking spaces occupied.....66% to 100%, Average 87%
- Percent of spaces occupied by vehicles with handicap license plates or placards16% to 22%, Average 18%
- Handicap vehicle parking turnover38% short term, 62% long term
- Distribution of handicap permits69% Maryland
21% Virginia
8% District of Columbia
2% Other states

During this survey, it was found that only two of the 55 handicap vehicles that were identified in the survey displayed handicap license plates, the remaining 53 displayed portable handicap placards. The relatively high proportion of handicap placards could indicate an abuse of handicap parking accommodations in this area. It should be noted that the genesis of Arlington County's initially controversial "All May Park, All Must Pay" was the perceived abuse of portable handicapped placards by U.S. Patent and Trademark employees (when PTO was located in Arlington).

Based on these initial observations and current parking meter rates, the fiscal impact of Alexandria's current policy for handicap parking in metered spaces is an annual revenue loss of approximately \$75,000 in the Carlyle parking district (District 3). Assuming a lower rate (10% vs. 18%) of handicap parking in Districts 1 and 2 and similar short/long-term parking ratios, the annual revenue loss in these districts is estimated to be \$80,000.