

Can We All Get Along?

Great question, Rodney King. Police brutality isn't the same as heated debates over how to handle downtown parking, but the unnecessary fighting over this issue also is bothersome.

At its last meeting the City Council initiated the return of a 3-hour time limit even though discussion of downtown parking was billed as "informational" on the agenda, with no action expected.

Yet without advance notice a motion suddenly appeared and was quickly passed unanimously. This violated the spirit, if not the letter, of Oregon's public meetings law, which requires "that decisions of governing bodies be arrived at openly."

Also, Council President Chuck Bennett falsely claimed that in 2013 the council had to adopt a citizen initiative to ban downtown parking meters and do away with 2-hour limits.

Actually the City Council didn't have to adopt the initiative language after 9,000 people signed a petition. Initiative backers wanted citizens to vote on the proposal in the May 2014 election.

Instead, the Council voted unanimously to implement it immediately, choosing on its own to institute free unlimited parking.

Now the Council has flip-flopped, unanimously moving to impose 3-hour limits from October through January after 30 downtown businesspeople submitted a petition asking for parking time limits to be reinstated, along with other changes.

Battling via successive dueling petitions is no way to form a viable downtown parking policy. This bouncing back and forth is absurd: 2-hour limit... parking meters on the way... no parking meters; no limits... 3-hour limit.

All in less than a year.

Part of the parking dysfunction is caused by the lack of a broad-based downtown association. The City Council did away with the previous one, making the City Manager a one-person downtown “board.” Hopefully businesses in the urban core can form a self-funded independent association to speak up and advocate for downtown interests.

In the absence of such, a parking group made up of some small business owners has gotten together. However, this group didn’t invite Carole Smith and Stephen Perkins to be part of the discussions until its most recent meeting.

Smith and Perkins led the successful Stop Parking Meters Downtown drive. Getting 9,000 signatures in a short time should put them at the table whenever adjustments to the newest City Council parking policy are being talked about.

In fact, Carole Smith should be co-chair of the parking group, which currently is led by Jim Vu. This will show that downtown businesses want to work with each other, not against each other.

I’m no Buddhist, but I do believe in the Middle Way.

Keep the ban on parking meters. A permanent 3-hour time limit might make sense. Strictly enforce the onstreet employee parking ban, adding downtown residents to the ban. Lower parking garage permit costs so offstreet parking is affordable for downtown employees and residents.

Everybody wins when people honestly and respectfully talk with each other, not past each other. Yes, we all can get along.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city’s Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com