



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

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TRAFFIC BOARD UPHOLDS TRAFFIC COMMISSION'S VOTE TO RAISE METER RATES, EXTEND HOURS, AND ADOPT NEW RESIDENT PERMIT PARKING PLAN

*T&P Director Tells Board Members that Traffic Commission Will Take Up
Proposal to Keep 20 Major Streets Open for Day/Eve Non-Resident
Parking; City Studies Parking Kiosk Proposals for Davis, Magoun Lots*

SOMERVILLE – In a series of unanimous votes on August 13, the City's three-member Traffic Board has upheld major changes in the City's parking policies originally approved by the Traffic Commission on May 21st. The Traffic Board votes came in the wake of a public hearing triggered by a petition received by the City on July 31st. The Board's votes allow recent changes to meter rates and hours to remain in effect while clearing the way for the implementation of resident permit parking on the remaining one-third of Somerville streets not already covered by permit rules.

Noting that his Board may approve or reject, but cannot modify, Commission actions, Traffic Board Chairman Peter L. Miller said, "Although a number of the people we heard from expressed strong support for permit parking, many others expressed genuine and legitimate concerns about the possible negative consequences of these changes. But I am comforted by the fact that so many of those specific concerns have already been addressed – and are being addressed in an ongoing way – by Traffic and Parking, by the Parking Solutions Task Force and by the Traffic Commission. It's clear that these policies are still quite malleable, and that the current versions are already very different from the originals."

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After the hearing and votes, Acting Director of Traffic and Parking James Kotzuba described the City's progress in adopting recommendations from the Parking Solutions Task Force, and from the public, to improve the operation and fairness of the new policies. "One of the most important changes we've seen is the way we're approaching residential permit parking on major thoroughfares across the city. On August 20th, the Traffic Commission will be taking up a proposal to keep unmetered parking on 20 major streets all over the city pretty much the way it is right now, except that unpermitted parkers will be blocked from parking on them from 2:30 to 8:00 a.m. That would leave a big reservoir of parking for day and evening visitors and business customers."

Kotzuba said the idea for a very short period of permit-only parking on major streets came from the business owners who serve on the Parking Solutions Task Force (PSTF). "We also got some great suggestions from the public at the July 30th Traffic Commission, where we heard a proposal to expand the number of streets from 8 to 18 and to end the permit-only restriction at 8 a.m. rather than 10 a.m.," said Kotzuba. Kotzuba said that subsequent discussion between task force members and local business owners had resulted in the addition of two more streets to the list.

The City has incorporated a number of other suggestions into its implementation plan for both the meter rates and hours, which increased in July, and the resident permit plan, which has not yet been implemented even though the original vote called for the change to be effective August 1st.

"We have already received formal proposals from suppliers of parking kiosk technology for the lots in Davis and Magoun Squares," said Kotzuba. "The new kiosks, which we hope will be in place early in 2010, will allow parkers to pay with credit and debit cards as well as Park Cards, and will also recharge the Park Cards. They will also let us vary the time limits and ultimately the price, too, by time of day, so that people who park for an evening in Davis Square can easily and conveniently pay once and walk away to enjoy dinner and a show or watch a game in their favorite bar." On Thursday night, Kotzuba told the Traffic Board that the City had adopted the PSTF recommendation to delay any enforcement of 10 p.m. meter operation in Davis or Magoun Squares until kiosks were in place.

Kotzuba also said told the Board that no part of the new residential parking permit plan would be enforced without extensive prior notification. "Even when we put up signs, we won't start immediate enforcement. We expect that our Communications Department will issue a Connect CTY call to the public, and we will follow up with flyers delivered door to door – and even then we'll have a period during which we issue warnings rather than actual tickets." Kotzuba suggested, however, that residents on non-permit streets might want to start now to sign up for permit stickers and visitor passes. "Why not beat the lines by coming in now?" he asked.

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Instructions about how to obtain a resident parking permit sticker and guest cards are available at the City's website, www.somervillema.gov on the Traffic and Parking Department home page, or by calling 311 (617-666-3311 from outside the city).

A copy of a new City brochure on the changes, a copy of a Frequently Asked Questions document, the full Parking Solutions Task Force Report and Recommendations, the Davis Square Parking Study, the Financial Advisory Committee report and a copy of the City Ordinance describing the composition, function and powers of the Traffic Commission and the Traffic Board are all available on a special "City Spotlight" Parking Policy Changes web page linked to the City website's home page.

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