



## Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

**Meeting Date:** February 18, 2014

**Prepared By/Phone Number:** Peter Einhorn, 854-9222

**Department Head:**

**Commissioners Court Sponsors:** Judge Sam Biscoe & Commissioner Bruce Todd, Precinct 2

### **AGENDA LANGUAGE:**

**CONSIDER AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION ON TRAVIS COUNTY EMPLOYEE PARKINGS ISSUES IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT;**

- A. EXPANDING ZONED PARKING TO ALL COUNTY OWNED PARKING FACILITIES IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT;**
- B. PROPOSED COMMUTE OPTIONS BENEFIT PROGRAM;**
- C. PRIORITIZE PHASING OUT WAITING LIST AND TERMINATION OF ANY COUNTY LEASED PARKING LOT AGREEMENTS THAT BECOME UNNECESSARY DUE TO ZONED PARKING; AND**
- D. AMENDMENTS TO CHAPTER 11 OF THE TRAVIS COUNTY CODE (PARKING POLICY)**

### **BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:**

Memo attached

### **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

Memo attached

### **REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:**

**Commissioner Bruce Todd**

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials must be submitted as a pdf to the County Judge's office, [agenda@co.travis.tx.us](mailto:agenda@co.travis.tx.us) by **Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.** for the next week's meeting.

## **Travis County Zoned Parking Policy Expansion**

The Travis County Commissioners Court is considering changes to parking policies that will affect some employees that work in the Central Business District. While the majority of downtown employees are already using unreserved or “zoned” parking, those that park in the *Granger Garage*, *San Antonio Street Garage*, *EOB Garage*, and adjacent surface lots continue to use individually-assigned or reserved parking spaces. This proposal will allow all current employees in county parking to continue to have guaranteed access to parking and will positively impact employees on the downtown parking waitlist.

### **Problem: Inefficient, inequitable parking**

#### **Individually-assigned parking spaces create significant inefficiencies in parking systems.**

Due to a range of factors (different schedules, work hours, vacation days, sick days, telecommuting days, off-site meetings, and occasional or frequent transit/carpooling/bicycling), assigned spaces often sit vacant. The Granger Garage and San Antonio Street Garage have a documented average of 33% vacancy during work hours.

**This inefficient system creates an equity problem.** There is a waitlist of **320** employees who cannot access county provided parking. Employees that choose to lease private parking spaces in the area are spending upwards of \$150 per month to park. The current wait is approximately 3 years, which represents a cost upwards of \$5,400 to a County employee before they are given a space.

Additionally, while there is ample space in the 700 Lavaca Garage to accommodate more employees, newer employees in the 700 Lavaca Building must wait behind employees who opt to wait for assigned spaces, further reducing the efficient use of our parking resources.

### **The Solution: Parking for Everyone**

**Eliminate the waiting list.** Data indicates that the downtown parking waitlist can be eliminated by expanding the 700 Lavaca unreserved parking policy to all parking facilities downtown. Comprehensive application of the parking policy means that there is enough parking to accommodate all current downtown employees at all times.

**Ensure parking availability.** The unreserved system accommodates significantly more employees, and best practices indicate that up to 40% more individuals can be assigned to a garage than there are parking spaces without any problems. To ensure parking availability staff will:

- Utilize a phased approach that begins with zoning the Granger and San Antonio garages.
- Issue additional parking permits in small groups, while continuously monitoring usage.

The 700 Lavaca garage unreserved parking has been very successful. Staff is confident that there will never be a time when an employee cannot find a parking space and will continue monitoring to ensure that this remains the case.

**Equity.** Each employee is an important member of the workforce, and Travis County thanks each employee for his or her public service by offering benefits on a fair and equitable basis.

## **Unreserved Parking: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is wrong with how things work now?**

Our parking infrastructure is underutilized. The San Antonio and Granger Parking Garages, for example, are on average 33% vacant. Downtown surface lots have similar vacancy rates. This amounts to about 248 spaces that regular sit vacant in those garages and about 60 more that sit vacant in adjacent county surface lots.

At the same time, there is a waitlist of county employees to receive parking. Currently, 320 individuals are on a list for downtown parking. The majority of these employees would prefer to park, and many are forced to spend upwards of \$150 per month to purchase parking privately. This is particularly unfortunate given that Travis County has the capacity to accommodate them. These employees must currently wait approximately 3 years to receive a parking space.

### **How does unreserved or “zoned” parking accommodate more people?**

Employees work very different schedules. Besides just different hours, they take different sick days, vacation days, work-from-home days, lunch breaks, and have different out of office meetings. Some employees may carpool certain days of the week and others may not be driving at all. As a result of this, assigned parking leaves many spaces vacant. Research indicates that all users can be accommodated even when allocating 20% to 40% more individuals than parking spaces. Travis County would be sure to never allocate more individuals than could be accommodated and employees should be assured that we guarantee they will always find a space available.

### **How will you be sure there will be enough spaces?**

We propose to start very gradually and monitor parking carefully and continuously. Only a few additional employees would be allocated to garages at the start, and the Parking Coordinator would monitor usage at different hours and different days of the week to ensure capacity. Additional employees would be allocated until utilization rates approached best practice levels. Monitoring would continue in order to ensure employees will always be able to find a parking space in their parking garage or lot.

### **How will you know who is allowed to park? How will this be implemented?**

Facilities Management has funds available to implement card-controlled entry in both the San Antonio and Granger Garages, which will provide access control. For the EOB Garage and surface lots, hangtags will be issued to employees. Compliance will be regularly monitored by the Parking Administrator. If a vehicle does not have a hangtag, penalties will be assessed and towing enforced.

### **I feel like I will waste a lot of time searching for parking.**

County experience with zoned parking in 700 Lavaca has been that most employees park in the same space or adjacent spaces every day that they drive.

### **My assigned parking space is an employee benefit.**

The vast majority of Travis County employees- both downtown and across the county- use zoned parking. Assigned spaces are the exception, not the norm at Travis County. Only employees in three garages (Granger, San Antonio, and EOB) and few surface lots are provided with assigned spaces, yet assigned spaces in these locations create both inequity and excess parking demand. All downtown employees can be accommodated in our existing garages and surface lots and yet there is a waitlist of 318 employees due to current policy. Expanding zoned parking, which is working very

well in the 700 Lavaca Garage, to other garages and lots will provide all downtown employees who wish to park with a space. If you currently have an assigned space, you will still always find parking in your parking garage when you need it, and all (or most) of your colleagues will also benefit from access to spaces.

**Will anybody still have an assigned space?**

According to current parking policy, yes, but only a few specified positions. The County's Parking Committee developed a parking policy, which was developed by through broad input and consensus-building. Assigned spaces are provided exclusively for elected officials (official & assistant director), county executives (official & assistant director), and courts (judge, court reporter, & bailiff). Details regarding parking policy can be found online via the intranet at <http://traviscentral/resources/commute/parking>.

The Commissioners Court may choose to revise the parking policy to change the specified positions list.

**Why can't we try something else first?**

Expanding zoned parking is a prerequisite for any other commute incentive. This is because zoned parking policy is uniquely able to eliminate the parking waitlist. For example, if the proposed commute benefit program were first implemented (aka. the \$100 cash-out), no spaces would be vacated because parking spaces vacated by participants would be immediately back-filled by employees on the waitlist. It is thus critical to first make more efficient use of our garages and parking lots through expanding zoned parking policy before implementing other initiatives.

## **Travis County Downtown Parking Cash-out/Commute Options Benefit Program**

The Travis County Commissioners Court is considering changes to parking policies that will affect employees that work in the Central Business District. This specifically means County employees that work at 700 Lavaca, Granger, Rusk, USB, the Courts complex, Central Booking, Executive Office Building, Palm Square, and the Medical Examiner's facility and park in the 700 Lavaca, Granger, and San Antonio garages, surface lots, or in spaces in private garages that the County leases for employees. It will also impact employees working downtown that do not yet have or have elected not to use a County provided parking space.

### **The Problem:**

Travis County is the 4<sup>th</sup> most congested metropolitan area in the United States and downtown Austin is the major congestion choke points in our region. This problem worsens as our region grows. Recent studies suggest that simply building additional capacity will not solve our congestion challenges. A significant part of the solution will have to be behavior change.

Travis County's employee base continues to grow just as the county population is growing. More county staff results in more demand for parking. The construction, maintenance, and operation of parking facilities represent significant costs to the County. In fact, studies suggest providing parking for employees costs the employer on average \$120 per month per space, accounting for construction, operation, and maintenance. From a financial perspective, it is critical for Travis County to minimize the long-term costs of parking provision and avoid excessive expenditure on new parking facilities.

### **The Solution: Change the ways in which we commute**

The Travis County Commissioners Court is considering helping employees who can to make that change through the **Commute Options Benefit Program**.

### **How it works:**

An employee can choose to give up his or her parking space and receive \$100 per month in their paycheck. The employee can use the funds in any way he or she chooses, but the funds are useful for offsetting other commute costs such as transit passes or cycling equipment. Other things to consider:

- This program is optional; it recognizes that the use of mode options other than single occupant vehicles for commuting will not work for all employees.
- All County employees that work in the Central Business District will be eligible. Wait-listed employees who opt-in will be removed from the wait list.
- If you participate in the program, and your needs change, you can opt out and receive county parking.

**Commute Options Benefit Program FAQs:**

**Why a parking “cash-out” program?**

Cost is consistently found to be the most important factor in individual decision-making. Since parking is a quantifiable benefit offered to Travis County employees, providing employees with the option to “cash-out” the value of the parking space allows individuals to make transportation decisions that serve them best. Cash in lieu of parking provides employees with a chance to make decisions about how to get to work on a level playing field.

**How does Travis County benefit from this?**

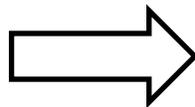
Leveling the playing field and removing disincentives for alternative transportation options will allow Travis County to address congestion and air pollution issues while reducing short-term and long-term parking facility costs.

**Do I have to pay taxes on the benefit?**

In order to enable County employees to benefit from any savings in commute costs the \$100 benefit will be classified as taxable income. As required by law, this also contains a retirement benefit. An example of an average county employee receiving the parking benefit is below. Your individual benefit might be very different:

\$46,000 annual income  
Single, 0 Exemptions

<b>Current check</b>	
Base Pay	1916.66
FCP-allowance	-
Federal w/h	259.53
Social sec w/h	118.83
Medicare w/h	27.79
Retirement	<b>134.17</b>
Short Term Dis	7.44
	<b>1,358.90</b>



Additional \$50 per check.

<b>New check</b>	
Base Pay	1916.66
FCP-allowance	50.00
Federal w/h	281.15
Social sec w/h	121.93
Medicare w/h	28.52
Retirement	<b>137.67</b>
Short Term Dis	7.44
	<b>1,389.95</b>

<b>NET Increase</b>
<b>\$34.55/check</b>
<b>\$69.10/month</b>

**How do I know what commute options are available to me?**

Travis County is committed to helping its workforce use commute options. The County recently launched a page on its employee intranet entitled *Commute Travis County* (found from work computer at: <http://traviscentral/resources/commute>). On this page employees can find information on all of the various commute options available for commuting into the Central Business District. These include (but are not limited to):

- Transit (Capital Metro and CARTS)
- Carpooling services that can help connect employees with others commuting downtown that are looking for ridesharing options
- Bicycle maps and Applications
- Pedestrian resources
- Smart phone apps and other resources that are available to commuter in Travis County
- Contact information for Movability Austin, which provides personalized travel assistance to Travis County employees in the downtown area