

Parking Outrage

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New prices at Parking Authority lots are excessive and ill-timed. Both the ballooning rates and the parking tax hike of 19-percent are causing outrage. But note how the outrage goes to different points from different groups. The downtown dwellers have outrage about the tax. Meanwhile, city council members are outraged about the price increases.

Here we go again as select populations mark additional bumps in the scattered journey of Pittsburgh's distress. Even parking can't muster the necessary gravity to pull together a unified front among the city's elected leaders.

The universal thread of the unraveling of Pittsburgh is the lack of harmony still lingering in the Pittsburgh landscape. We are out of sync. Our karma has bad mojo.

The Pittsburgh discord jumps everywhere among our special interest groups. The mayor goes in one direction. City council putters in fragmentation.

Citizens are shocked. Dan Frankle's (D, State Rep) last message was with hope that Pittsburgh's solution might come from Harrisburg in November 2004 after the election from a lame-duck legislature.

The cast of characters expands with the arrival of Act 47 stewards. Arrive with skill, luck and lots of glue to bind together solutions that include all populations and all of the public authorities. (Parking, Water & Sewer, Urban Redevelopment, Stadium & Exhibition, Housing)

The patience of the citizens has worn thin with too much talk of a Harrisburg bail-out. The city's elected leadership seems idle to the downtown merchants who have been ranting.

Council calls for an audit of the parking situation. I find this to be a weak response to a large problem that impacts residents, non-city residents and business owners. Bill Peduto (Pgh City Council) seeks to uncover the mastermind's trickery in these price manipulations, but that won't solve the problem. Rolling back the price gouging would be swell too, but way too tame.

Our city is at the brink. The best our elected leaders can muster is a shout to the controller for a six-to-eight week study on the possibility for more finger

pointing yet to come.

In this climate, tame counter-attacks needs to be supercharged. We need city council to make a rampage with the citizens, like bulls in a china shop, to get our own house in order. We need energy for real solutions, now.

Memo to city council: "Get tough!" Be like bulls. A stampede is brewing. More are going to vote with their feet. This tailspin isn't pulling people into the city, like another Labor Day Parade. The funk equals more outward migration.

Bold leaders would liquidate the Parking Authority. Take a page from my play book when I was a candidate for Mayor. People responded favorably when I called for the authority's liquidation.

Craft a year by year, staged process to sell the Parking Authority assets. Shift some duties to a drastically downsized parking department within the city's administration. Be certain to allow for the employment of a traffic engineer as well.

Consider State Rep, Jeff Habay's, suggestion when the Turnpike Commission recently announced its price escalation. Habay called for the elimination of the Turnpike Commission, not a tiny audit.

Sell 20% of the Parking Authority assets each year. Enlist FreeMarkets' help on



some transactions. Entertain bid proposals from unions, fraternal organizations, faith-based groups, LDCs, home-owner associations, Point Park College, etc.

After making bulk transfers of property ownership, a city-wide gross reduction in the parking tax would be triggered. Staged and mandated by suggested legislation, the 50% parking tax could drop to 10%. Institutionalize a time-line trigger for the tax reduction from 50% to 10%.

Couple the higher parking taxes with a sunset and a liquidation of the authority. Everything can occur within six years. Then sustain the lower tax rate for five additional years. We can live with the 50% parking tax for a number of years as long as a trusted, iron-clad policy bound by legislation was part of a logical exit strategy.

Peduto correctly states that the city has a hand in establishing marketplace prices. The Parking Authority, a public agency, owns and controls many spaces. However, the real weight in the marketplace is not with the rate and car-by-car parking. Parking meters eating quarters are peanuts when searching for the root of the problems. Even \$200 monthly leases are just leaves on the tree of suffering. Daily

transactions give some marketplace impact. However, the serious marketplace stumble comes from the Parking Authority due to its presence. To be or not to be is the real issue concerning the Parking Authority.

Because of Pittsburgh's Parking Authority, we don't have private investors building commercial parking garages.

History knows the deeds and trends of marketplace miss-conduct. Corporate welfare mentality rots Pittsburgh to the core. We must jettison these bad habits.

Lazarus got its own, internal parking garage, built by the Parking Authority. PNC expanded at Firstside with a new office building. Right next door came an Authority garage and T-stop. The North Shore has and expects more service by public-owned garages. The Parking Authority is a conduit for draining good money on bad projects. The authority racks up debt and aims to build a massive structure to put a traffic choke hold on the North Shore.

Policy blunders, thanks in part to Jim Ferlo, such as the free sparkle season parking didn't solve anything. Pittsburgh is discovering that it can't move ahead by patting

itself on the back.

The parking mess won't fix itself in today's Pittsburgh marketplace. The private sector is too smart to put capital at risk because of the 900-pound gorilla called the Parking Authority. Don't tame this gorilla. Put a fork in it. Pulverize. Liquidate.

Pittsburgh would eliminate its long-standing parking problems if City Council would vote to liquidate the parking authority and then slash parking taxes. Bold moves could be announced this week, put into a long-term plan, and make the situation acceptable.

Urgent legislation for staged liquidation the Parking Authority is prudent so Council can move on and set new sights on other targets: Pgh development dund, URA and former Zone 4 Police Station.

City council could craft legislation that would sell the former Zone 4 station. The building is empty and being painted with outside contractors. Mayor Murphy is hell-bent on using the building as a truancy center against the will of the law, the zoning board, and local citizens. City Council can't get a straight answer from the Mayor on the building, so City Council should sell the building. Don't tame, liquidate by legislation. Be bold.

