



News

A LOT OF CONFUSION OVER PARKING FEES

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Item Photo By OWEN O'ROURKE

The kiosk at the Ellis Street parking lot in Lynn.

By GAYLA CAWLEY

LYNN — Mass Senior Action Council members are upset about what they say is a new charge for the Ellis Street parking lot next to the Senior Center, but the city's parking director says that charge has been in effect for the past few years.

Pam Edwards, community organizer for Mass Senior Action Council, said seniors have been able to park in the Ellis Street parking lot, where they typically park to attend the nearby Senior Center, for free until a few weeks ago when they noticed a new charge of \$5 a day for that lot.

"For years, that lot besides there had been basically free," Edwards said.

Edwards said over the years, when seniors would get registered at the Senior Center, they would get a parking pass and wouldn't get ticketed even if they were using street parking for over 30 minutes. She said the same rule would apply to volunteers at the center, who could also use the parking lot for free.

Edwards said the parking sticker for seniors and volunteers has granted them free parking in the past during Senior Center business hours. She said that has changed with the \$5 fee.

"The city is putting a fee on seniors disproportionately and making the senior center unaffordable to attend," Edwards said.

Edwards said seniors are on a fixed income and many low-income seniors in Lynn have incomes of \$21,000 a year or less. She said the city has already raised the price for paratransit services and is "now taking away their option to use their own car" to get to the center, which she said is a way to get out of the house for many seniors.

Edwards said there hasn't been a reason given for the charge, as it was "just instituted and changed." She said Senior Center members want to follow the law and no longer know if their parking sticker is still valid.

Robert Stilian, parking director for the city, said that \$5 charge for the Ellis Street lot has been in effect for years. He said the only change to that lot recently is that a new kiosk was installed. He said the charge has been there for at least three years.

"It's always been a charged lot," Stilian said.

Stilian said sometimes there hasn't been an attendant at the lot to enforce it, but the charge for the lot is \$1 an hour and \$5 a day.

"I don't set the policies," Stilian said. "[It's] all done by the **Off-Street Parking Commission**. Whatever the rules are is whatever I enforce. The way it is set up right now, everybody should be paying for parking."

Stilian said other downtown lots are treated the same way with a charge. He said the issue will be taken up at the Off-Street Parking Commission meeting Tuesday at 6 p.m. at Lynn City Hall.

Edwards said Mass Senior Action will be at that meeting and plan to argue their case. **Ruth "Kiki" Chaiton and Rosa Bentley**, seniors and members of Mass Senior Action, said they have been affected by the parking charge and might speak at the meeting.

Chaiton said she thinks there should be exceptions to the parking charge for seniors and volunteers for the Senior Center. She said the center has been an outlet for her husband, 90, who had been ill and didn't want to leave the house.

"I brought him in there and they welcomed him with open arms," Chaiton said of the center.

Chaiton said her husband goes to play pool at the center and is very comfortable being there.

"If it wasn't for the poolroom, he'd probably still be in his apartment," Chaiton said.

Chaiton said her husband doesn't go as frequently now, but when she was bringing him around there about three times a week, she doesn't recall ever paying to park. She said the charge would definitely detract from the trips there. She urged the city to find other ways to get their revenue, and that the city "shouldn't do it on the backs of the seniors."

Bentley, 70, said she uses the Senior Center as often as she can. She said she goes on the days that she's not busy and used to go every day.

Bentley said she hasn't driven her car to the center recently, but has spoken to other people who are "saying they can't afford the \$5 fee." If the parking charge remains in effect, she said she wouldn't be going to the center as often.

"I would just stay home," Bentley said.

Bentley said she goes to the Senior Center to socialize, eat, and participate in activities.

"It's a resource being taken away," Bentley said. "The senior citizens just can't afford \$5 a day to come to the center."

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