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Possible Innovative Approach to Parking in Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Streetline Smart Parking Proposal

As any resident knows, parking and traffic congestion are key issues in downtown Lafayette. City leaders are well aware of the on-going problem, plus the added dilemma of motorists attempting to park at BART, who end up finding spots in neighborhoods and shopping centers, contributing to the parking crunch.

That's why a meeting was called to look at a potential solution. "We are looking at comprehensive parking strategies," said Niroop Srivatsa, planning and building director. The city leaders, merchants and interested citizens who attended the Parking Ordinance Committee's meeting in late March learned about this innovative, technology-based parking guidance system.

Cleverly named "Parker," by Foster City-based startup Streetline, directs drivers to the closest available spots in real time via voice guidance through smart phones, explained Ken Voss, senior vice president, and has a host of other savvy features – like searchable parking near a destination, the ability to pay for parking via the phone and even an alert when time is about to expire. The system uses sensing equipment, software and information services to provide optimal parking solutions for drivers. The idea is to change driver behavior to better utilize parking inventory and enhance the productivity of enforcement. Marketing materials for the Streetline proposal note that cities using Streetline "enjoy reduced congestion, better space utilization and increased commerce for merchants" that translates into increased sales tax revenue for the city.

The app works for iPhones as well as Android devices. Along with Parker, Streetline also offers other services like ParkerMap, ParkSight Analytics and more.

Preliminary talks are underway between Streetline and BART; Srivatsa pointed out that the transit agency has shown a willingness to listen.

There was some concern that, if adopted, the system would drive customers away from local businesses. "Just the opposite," said Voss, explaining that by making parking easier, commerce increases.

Voss shared a number of interesting factoids: studies have shown in the average American city it takes 6

to 14 minutes to find a place to park and 92 percent of violators parked at expired meters never get caught.

A hockey puck-like device is implanted in the street asphalt in public parking spaces. Streetline owns, installs and maintains the pucks and offers the service to the city like a utility along with mobile payment technology, if available. Parking information is available around the clock. One possible upside, depending on your point of view, is a huge increase in officer "productivity" – the technology shows meter enforcement professionals quickly and easily on an iPad where parkers have overstayed their allotted time.

This reinvented parking technology has been amazingly successful, and is already used in 45 cities large and small across the country, including New York, Boston, Los Angeles, 10,000-resident Capitola, and San Mateo, and is expanding to Europe. To date the system has facilitated over 230,000,000 parking events. Every city that has signed up with Streetline has renewed the service, said Voss.

Calling existing systems, such as chalking tires, "very inefficient," Voss opined that ultimately individual parking meters will be obsolete. "You don't need a cash register at each space."

People who listened to the presentation were concerned that many of the older residents who park in Lafayette may not have smart phones. Voss recommended dynamically updateable signage that gives directions to available spots.

Cost is always a factor; there are one-time activation fees per space and a monthly fee for service. A pilot program is possible to evaluate the system. For Lafayette, it's estimated that approximately 70 percent of the initial investment can be returned in the first year and the entire investment can be returned in about 17 months, paid for through increased enforcement.

At this point, it's unclear if the city will pursue Streetline, but their presentation and proposal – available on the city website, was food for thought. For more information, go to Streetline.com or view their entire proposal at www.lovelafayette.com – go to public meetings, then click on the March 25 Parking Ordinance Committee.



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