

Residential Parking Permit (RPP) Program Policy Modifications Overview, April 2025

Background

The City Commission established the residential parking permit program (RPP) by ordinance in December 2013. The Mobile GR Commission has periodically updated the RPP program with its authority to administer and implement its rules and regulations. In 2021, the Mobile GR Department began conducting citywide parking counts, and in the following year, the Mobile GR Commission approved changes to the policy such that the department would identify prospective Residential Parking Program Zones (RPPZs) based upon this data. In Spring of 2024, Mobile GR Staff introduced zones eligible to be considered for the RPP program. The new process was not well understood and stoked alarm among community members. Staff and leadership determined to revisit the resident-initiated process and identify other potential policy improvements based on robust public engagement and input about the program.

Policy Refinement Process

Following lessons learned from introducing implementation of these policies in Spring of 2024, last Fall Mobile GR staff began an ongoing and iterative process of research including peer review (*Appendix A*) and a discussion of holistic policy revisions. This included identification of numerous peer cities, program reviews, survey development, survey solicitation and review, and interviews with staff from select peer cities. Research was discussed and vetted with planning, parking enforcement, and business office staff.

The proposed revised policy included moving from a data driven, Mobile GR staff-initiated process to a resident petition process, and changing the minimum size of the zone from three (3) block faces to ten (10) street segments. Based upon community feedback, guest permit types and exemptions were also reviewed. Under the proposed policy, residents would be allowed to hold more than one (1) permit up to six (6) per household, reducing the need for residents to purchase guest permits for frequent visitors. Six (6) complementary guest permits were also recommended to be included with a residential permit.

Presentation of Policy Revisions

The revised RPP policy was presented and discussed among Commissioners at the February 2025 Mobile GR Commission meeting. Commissioners discussed several topics, and many of the proposed revisions were agreed upon (*Appendix B*). Discussion items included the pricing of permits, limits related to permits, costs of administering the program, mechanisms for issuing permits and enforcement, and impact on businesses. Following this meeting, staff conducted subsequent research, discussions, and review to develop the language in the action item enclosed.

Updates and Recommendation

Based upon discussion with MGRC, the RPP policy recommendations and research were revisited in full. Questions were discussed among policy, business office, operations, and enforcement staff. The revised policy recommended for adoption incorporates the following changes and information:

- **Resident-Led Policy Initiation:** The threshold for resident-led initiation was adjusted from 60% to a 51% majority.
- **Support and Accommodation for Businesses:** The unique needs of local businesses will be considered in the development and implementation of a new RPP Zone, including the availability of non-resident monthly permits to be made available to the public. The RPP policy allows the City to determine the geographic extent of RPP zones and monthly permits on a zone-by-zone basis. Employers or businesses could purchase publicly available monthly permits for use within the RPP zone. The City also has other tools that can be deployed for businesses to improve parking around their establishments, including but not limited to 1-2 hour parking zones, loading zones, and metered parking.
- **Six Permits Per household:** The City's current zoning code permits up to six (6) unrelated individuals to live in a household, necessitating a minimum of six (6) per household to avoid an administrative burden to determine which households should be allowed more than others based on current household size. However, the department has the right to review and limit permits at its discretion.
- **Use of License Plate Readers:** The benefits and tradeoffs of License Plate Readers (LPRs) were revisited and discussed further and its use for implementation remains. The majority of peer communities use LPR. It is a more efficient use of enforcement staff time and reduces the risk fraudulent permits. LPRs is the modern industry standard and significantly less costly than administering paper permits.

Additionally, Commissioners asked specific questions regarding the cost of permits and the cost of program administration, as well as the amount of time allocated to the RPP program among the City's many parking and mobility needs.

Cost of Permits, Administration, and Opportunity

On-street public parking is a valuable and finite resource, particularly in high-demand areas. Properly priced on-street parking ensures turnover and adequate availability. Peer communities charge residents anywhere from \$20 to \$300 per year, and seven out of nine peer cities assign higher cost for an annual permit than Grand Rapids (*Appendix C*). Additionally, a program to grant private property owners exclusive priority access to the public right of way at no cost would not serve the City's strategic goals. In addition to diminishing capacity to support the City's mobility goals and objectives elsewhere, a free residential permits program would be expensive and burdensome to administer. Growth of the program where it is not needed could have severe implications for the Mobile GR budget.

The RPP program operates at a significant budgetary loss to the City (*Appendix D*). The Neighbors of Belknap Lookout RPP yields \$6,000 in revenue annually but requires \$20,000 annually in costs to administer and enforce. It is estimated to cost between \$45,000 and \$60,000 to establish a zone similar in size when factoring in staff time and materials in addition

to a similar \$14,000 annual operating expense for administration and enforcement (*Appendix D*). Technically, the program would be cost neutral if permit rates were raised to \$160/year for the first five years and \$100/year subsequently. However, the true cost is primarily contributed in terms of staff hours, and there is an opportunity cost of other work by business office, enforcement, and planning staff, that cannot be recouped with project funds.

Implementing an RPP program comes with additional trade-offs from a policy and programmatic perspective. While RPPs provide customer service to residents in neighborhoods with significant nodes of activity that generate considerable demand for on-street parking, they do not align with many of the programs and policies directly supported by the Mobile GR Department and the City's Community Master Plan (CMP). While there are ways to accommodate businesses located in and adjacent to RPPs (and the amended RPP policy language includes this), the ideal solution for businesses and mixed-use development patterns is to make parking available on a level playing field. The proposed revisions to the Residential Parking Permit Program strike a delicate balance for our growing community between the provision of convenient on-street parking access for select residents and accommodating the parking needs of businesses and visitors.

APPENDIX A: RPP PEER RESEARCH RECAP

Research was conducted on the RPP programs in several cities, including development of a custom survey mailed to peer communities with responses received from Spokane, WA; Ann Arbor, MI; Madison, WI; and Rochester, NY. Staff additionally met with the City Transportation Engineer for Salt Lake City, UT and the Pittsburgh Parking Authority in Pittsburgh, PA. Following the last presentation to MGRC, staff revisited existing research, asked clarifying questions, and reviewed practices in Albany, NY; Columbus, OH; and Minneapolis, MN. Topics that were reviewed with peers included costs, hours of enforcement, types of permits, criteria to evaluate a zone, criteria to establish a zone, role of residents, size of zones, and timelines for approval. Further, cities were queried specifically about their approach to business permitting.

City	Policy Research	Interview	Survey
Spokane, WA	X		X
Ann Arbor, MI	X		X
Salt Lake City, UT	X	X	
Rochester, MN	X		X
Madison, WI	X		X
Pittsburgh, PA	X	X	
Columbus, OH	X		
Minneapolis, MN	X		
Albany, NY	X		

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PROPOSED RPP POLICY MODIFICATIONS

The following policy changes were also detailed at the February 2025 meeting.

Resident-Led Zone Initiation Process: A resident petition initiates the analysis and evaluation process for a RPPZ and its recommendation for approval. The petition requires support from a majority of residents and landlords from at least ten contiguous street segments in a neighborhood. Once implemented, a zone can be modified after a minimum of eighteen (18) months and dissolved after a minimum of three (3) years.

Resident-Led Zone Modification or Dissolution Process: The same process as initiation applies for eliminating a zone or modifying a zone. For modifications, a review process is triggered by signatures from a majority of residents from a minimum of four (4) contiguous street segments connected to an existing RPPZ.

Adjustment to Permit Types and Applicable Uses: Permit holders can apply for more than one (1) residential permit which can be used for frequent visitors (e.g., caretaker, friend, or relative). The process for purchasing guest passes remains the same but permit holders also would receive six (6) complimentary guest passes per 6-month renewal. Short-term permits are also available for 24 hours for other non-residents with short-term parking needs (e.g., contractors, landlords, short-term rental tenants). Monthly permits are determined by zone based on need and land use characteristics.

Incidental and Compliance Language Adjustments: The policy provides definitions for referenced terms (e.g., “street segment”) as well as references to City code and employs clear and consistent terms for administrative entities (e.g., “the Mobile GR Department” instead of “Mobile GR”).

APPENDIX C: PEER COMMUNITY PRICING AND ENFORCEMENT

City	Cost for Resident Permit	Types of Permits	Hours of Enforcement	License Plate Enforcement
Spokane, WA	\$300/Year	Resident	8 a.m. – 7 p.m. Mon – Sat	Yes
Ann Arbor, MI	\$75/Year	Resident, Visitor	8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Mon – Fri	No
Salt Lake City, UT	\$50/Year	Resident, Visitor, Business, Non-resident property owner	Determined by zone	No
Rochester, MN	\$33/Year	Resident, Business, Temporary	8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Mon – Fri	Yes
Madison, WI	\$42/year	Resident, Caretaker	8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Mon – Fri	No
Pittsburgh, PA	\$40/Year	Resident, Visitor, Business	Determined by zone	Yes
Columbus, OH	Determined by zone; \$25-100/Year	Resident, Visitor. Determined by zone: Business, Institution	Determined by zone	Yes
Minneapolis, MN	\$25/Year	Resident, Visitor, Service, Temporary, Business	Determined by zone	Yes
Albany, NY	\$20/Year	Resident, Visitor, Business, Transient	8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Mon – Fri	Yes
Grand Rapids, MI	\$30/Year	Resident, Guest, Short-term, Monthly	Determined by zone	Yes

APPENDIX D: COST ESTIMATES FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW RPP ZONE AND ITS OPERATION

New Zone Establishment	Cost
Staff time* (initiation to approval)	\$25,000 - \$35,000
Sign installation	\$20,000 - \$25,000
Total cost to establish	\$45,000 - \$60,000

Annually Operation	Cost
Administration and enforcement	\$20,000
Revenue (200 permits)	\$6,000
Total cost	\$14,000