Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
Wednesday, 05 December 2012 20:28

http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/120612/parkingSM.png**Port hopes plan to issue reminders rather than fines demonstrates that parking can be convenient for those who work and shop downtown**

People in downtown Port Washington keep their eyes peeled for Diane Jung.

Jung is the police department's parking enforcement officer. When people see her traveling through downtown chalking the tires of parked cars, there's an immediate reaction.

"They watch for me and move their cars right away," Jung said. "They'll drive around the block and park again, sometimes in the same spot. They know I'll be back again in two hours."

News of Jung's visit travels fast, with some downtown workers calling neighboring offices to spread the word.

Parking is one of the most vexing and perennial issues in downtown Port. It's been the subject of studies and debate for years.

Next week, the police department, along with the Port Chamber of Commerce and Main Street program, will embark on a parking initiative aimed at downtown businesses and workers.

As part of the initiative, Jung will issue warnings instead of tickets during January. Along with the tickets will be a map of available downtown parking lots and a list of parking options.

"We want to get employees to park away from the downtown streets where tourists and customers go to park," Police Chief Kevin Hingiss said. "I think that's something that can easily be solved by employers saying to their employees, 'You can't park there.'"

Parking enforcement is a thankless task. Jung said she's been harangued and harassed as she works — all over a $10 ticket.

One man she ticketed in the marina parking lot was so upset that he followed her around downtown, she said, adding that tickets in those days were only $5.

"First he ran ahead of me, trying to plug the meters so I couldn't give any more tickets," Jung said. "He ran out of change pretty quickly, so then he literally followed me around, yelling at

me.”

One young man who saw her writing a ticket came rushing out of the building, cursing her.

“I finally told him, ‘If you would have been polite and decent to me, I wouldn’t have given you the ticket,’” Jung said. “He was shocked. I never had trouble with him after that.”

She has discretion with the tickets she writes until she places them on the vehicles, she noted. A lot of people who run out of buildings will beg her not to ticket them, and she said her response is simple.

“If you’re going to move it right now, fine,” Jung said. “Otherwise, you’re getting the ticket.”

Last year, 1,613 tickets were issued parking violations, most of them for meter violations and overtime parking, according to the police department.

She varies the time of day she goes out, as well as which days she chalks tires, Jung said. The most tickets she’s ever given out in a day was 54 — a day she went out at 4 p.m.

“There were some very upset people,” she said, adding it’s generally local people who get most upset about parking tickets, not visitors. Visitors generally realize the cost of the parking ticket is minor.

“The officers tell me they would rather give a speeding ticket than a parking ticket,” Jung said. “People complain much more about a parking ticket.

“I think people just get mad at themselves for being so forgetful. It was a stupid mistake of theirs.”

Although the job can be frustrating, especially when people just move their vehicles a few spots to avoid a ticket, it’s a necessary thing, Jung said.

“We don’t have a lot of street parking available, and we want to make sure people who come to Port can find it,” she said. “We don’t want people to be turned off to Port because there’s no parking.”

In general, people can park on downtown streets for two hours. But there are other options, Jung said, noting there are numerous public parking lots where spaces sit vacant all day.

Parking passes can also be purchased from the city for some parking lots.

The parking initiative being run by the police department, Main Street and the Chamber of Commerce aims to educate people about these options. It will begin next week when property owners and businesses will receive letters explaining their parking options, complete with a map showing where public parking lots are located. Businesses will be encouraged to share this information with employees.

While Jung won't be giving out parking tickets in January, she will issue warnings, and habitual offenders will find themselves with a stack of warnings. In February, tickets will be issued.

"Hopefully they'll do the math and realize it (the parking fines) adds up," Main Street Executive Director Sara Grover said. "There are more than 400 parking spaces downtown, and people need to find those most appropriate for them."

The initiative was spurred, in part, by the increased development in downtown, Grover said. As more shops open and more people visit those stores, the need for parking will increase as well.

"We really need to get a handle on it," she said. "If we aren't in the habit of parking appropriately, it's only going to get worse."

It's not that the city doesn't have parking or that it's too far from shops, Grover said.

"When you park at Home Depot, even if you park close to the door, you're actually parking further away than you do here in downtown Port," she said. "The Costco lot is massive. If you go there on a Saturday, easily you're walking what would be a block or more in Port Washington."

Part of the challenge is getting people to value downtown businesses enough to be willing to walk a short distance to get there, said Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development.

"Why do people walk a distance to get to Target or Costco? They value the business they're going to," he said.

The city also needs to do a better job of showing motorists where the municipal parking lots are, Tetzlaff said.

"If you're driving on Franklin Street, you wouldn't know about these lots," he said. Way-finding signs have been designed, but are only partially funded for next year, he noted.

Although the solution to Port's parking woes is obvious to some people — add more parking lots or create parking structures — that isn't the answer, said Jason Wittek, a Port resident who is on the board of directors for the Wisconsin chapter of the Congress for New Urbanism.

"I think downtown has more than adequate parking," he said. "If you look at it on Google Earth, it looks like downtown's been bombed out."

Too many parking lots means a loss of potential development and a loss of tax base, he said, adding parking isn't an attractive use of downtown land.

"Most parking in downtown areas detract from vitality," Wittek said. "When you have surface

parking, you take away from anything else that could be there."

A better answer might be to build multi-use structures on the city's side streets that incorporate public parking on one level with commercial and residential development on other levels, Wittek said.

A lack of parking might also help promote other forms of transportation, such as biking, he said, or even prompt people who work in the community to live downtown.

To help identify what its parking issues are and develop solutions, the city has asked the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to conduct a study of downtown parking that would look at everything from the number of spaces available to the demand for parking in various parts of downtown.

"You can have all the parking in the world, but if it isn't in the right spot, it isn't going to help," Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven said.

The study, which could take most of next year, would also look at current restrictions and whether they should be changed, where parking should be developed, the potential for parking structures and how to regulate it, whether with meters, kiosks or tickets.

"We anticipate this will be a valuable resource as we make decisions in the future," Vanden Noven said. "I think it's valuable to have someone look objectively at these things."

Image Information: PORT WASHINGTON'S parking enforcement officer Diane Jung will be issuing warnings next month instead of tickets as part of an initiative to educate the public about parking options in downtown. The initiative is sponsored by the police department, Port Washington Main Street and the Port Chamber of Commerce. Photo by Sam Arendt