

Students opting for streets over lots

Written by Bill Schanen IV
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Some PWHS drivers say they park on crowded roads because of \$100 school fee

The start of classes has brought the return of parking congestion near Port Washington High School, where dozens of students park on nearby neighborhood streets instead of school lots.

While it's difficult to find a parking place on quiet Jackson Street east of the school or well-traveled Holden Street north of the school, there are 48 open parking spaces in the school parking lots.

That doesn't surprise students.

"Paying \$100 for one parking place is a lot of money for a student," senior Michael Hernandez said as he walked from school to his car parked on Jackson Street Monday. "And why pay anything when you can park on the street for free?"

The high school parking fee was implemented in 2006 after being proposed by an ad hoc committee charged with developing strategies to reduce spending and increase revenue. Students pay \$100 a school year to park in one of 142 parking places in lots less than a block from the high school. The fee is prorated by the quarter.

The fee has the potential to generate more than \$14,000 a year in revenue for the district, but some city officials said it's not helping the parking problems on streets near the high school.

"I get that it's a revenue source for the district, but I think it (parking) is something the city and school district need to discuss," said Ald. Dan Becker, who is also a member of the city's Traffic Safety Committee.

Responding to complaints earlier this summer, the committee proposed and the Common Council approved an ordinance that prohibits parking on a small section of Holden Street because of safety concerns caused by student parking.

The no-parking restriction remedied safety concerns on Holden Street, but problems persist elsewhere, officials said.

"Now we have an entire school parking lot that's empty," Becker said. "The space is there for students. You would like to see the school spaces used to prevent this sprawl onto city streets."

Street parking near the high school is not a new problem. Nearby residents have complained over the years about blocked driveways, congested streets, heavy traffic and a lack of parking in their neighborhoods.

City officials have responded by restricting or eliminating parking in some of these areas but realize such restrictions also affect residents, who like other city taxpayers want to park on the streets near their homes occasionally.

Last month, Ald. Paul Neumyer said residents on Hillcrest Court, a small dead-end street one

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block from the high school, have repeatedly called him with concerns about students taking all the parking spots near their homes and making it difficult for them when they back out of their driveways.

But Port Washington-Saukville School Supt. Michael Weber said he doesn't believe the school parking fee is the cause of the problems.

"When there was no fee, there was still parking on the street," he said. "I'm not so sure the fee is the issue here."

The demand for student parking has ebbed and flowed over the years. As recently as a few years ago, the high school did not have enough parking places to accommodate the demand.

To help, the city allowed free student parking in its swimming pool parking lot off Webster Street just south of the high school. That lot remains popular with students despite the fact there are open spaces in the high school parking lots, which are slightly closer to the main entrance of the school.

Police Chief Richard Thomas said he plans to have officers analyze traffic accidents near the high school to see if student parking is a safety problem.

"I drove past the high school the other day and thought, 'Oh my gosh, there's an entire parking lot wide open,'" he said. "Parking on the street definitely creates congestion, and if we're responding to an emergency, that can be an issue."

Street parking is not the police department's only responsibility. The department also monitors the high school parking lots, issuing \$5 tickets to students who park in these lots without a permit.

"Believe it or not, we have a couple students who take the chance and park there without a permit," Thomas said. "I guess they figure a few \$5 tickets are cheaper than the \$100 permit."