

Opponents lobbying council against kiosks, increased parking fines

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Town proposals to nearly double parking fines to \$60, and to introduce paid parking on Worth Avenue and Royal Poinciana Way are bumping into some opposition.

Town Council members said they've received a small number of letters and emails, and most are against the higher fines, parking kiosks, or both.

Irene Lummertz, of Irene Lummertz Jewelry at 245 A Worth Ave., wrote that her customers have made it clear they oppose kiosks on that street and that they can shop elsewhere, such as at the Gardens Mall, where parking is free.

"Doing business in this economic environment is difficult enough; if the town adds this burden and we lose customers, my store will not be able to continue to do business on Worth Avenue," she said.

Some business owners have placed signs in their windows on Royal Poinciana Way stating their opposition to kiosks or higher parking penalties. Leslie Evans, a local real estate attorney who owns property on that street, said the merchants will be at Tuesday's Town Council meeting to state their opposition. The meeting begins at 9:30 a.m. in Town Hall.

"It's a hidden tax, and it's going to hurt the merchants and the local people who shop there," Evans said of the paid parking. "It's a neighborhood street."

The council should look for other revenue sources, such as selling surplus town property or pressuring Palm Beach County for more tourism tax dollars to help pay for coastal protection, Evans said.

Councilman Robert Wildrick, who chairs the Finance and Taxation Committee, has said the kiosk revenue could help finance the town's ongoing war against beach erosion. Coastal protection is expected to average more than \$5 million annually over the next decade, and the council has no plan to fund it after the budget year that ends Sept. 30.

Wildrick and other council members contacted for this story said the email and letters they've received are mostly, if not overwhelmingly, against the higher parking fines and paid parking on the two commercial streets. But they also said it hasn't been a lot of mail, and that it remains to be seen if it's indicative of the larger community sentiment.

The council members said they're keeping an open mind heading into the meeting.

"From my perspective, the overwhelming silent majority is not objecting," Council President David Rosow said.

Rosow said someone at the Palm Beach Hotel condominiums on Sunrise Avenue is orchestrating opposition to kiosks on that street under the illusion that they are proposed for the entire Poinciana business district. But the Finance and Taxation committee, made up of Wildrick and Rosow, has only recommended the kiosks for the street of Royal Poinciana Way and Worth Avenue, he said.

Councilman Richard Kleid said not everyone is in full possession of the facts. Some don't realize that a grace period of 15 minutes is being considered so people making a quick dash into a store won't have to pay for their space, or that first-time violators would receive a gentle warning instead of a ticket.

"I'm not sure that is known," he said.

Not everyone is fully opposed. The Worth Avenue Association and Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce both support kiosks on Worth Avenue while opposing an increase in fines. Paid parking on the Avenue will discourage store employees from taking spaces that should be used by merchants, and could also generate revenue to market local businesses, the merchants association has said.

Wildrick said he will consider everyone's opinion before making up his mind, but added, "We have an imminent financial need."



"It is important for the citizens to realize we will need to raise an average of about \$5 million a year more in taxes, starting next year, to cover our sand needs," he said. "This conceivably could take our millage rate from 3.25 (per \$1,000 of taxable value) to \$3.72, if no other sources of income are found."

Wildrick said the kiosk revenue alone would not be enough to avoid a tax increase, but that the council could continue to look for other revenue sources to minimize the need for taxes.

During the first five years, the kiosks would net an estimated average of \$430,032 on Worth Avenue and \$288,557 on Royal Poinciana Way, according to Deputy Town Manager Tom Bradford. Under one proposal being considered by the council, parking benefit districts would be set up to collect one-third of the kiosk revenue from each street, and the money used for marketing and promotion of those businesses.

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