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Parking brouhaha a real puzzler

By **SUSAN SHERRING**

To hear some of the more fanatical describe it, increased parking rates could not just kill local businesses but also play a role in the death of the Sunday visit to grandma's.

It seems if it costs a few extra bucks to visit grandma in her downtown apartment, it will also affect what her visitors wear -- if it means they have to take the bus or are forced to walk several blocks to get to where they're going, they might not be able to don their Sunday best.

In the end, the trip just might not be made.

Who knew parking rates could elicit such an emotional reaction?

Last week, committee members listened to more than 40 delegates mostly argue against raising parking fees to \$3 an hour -- only to recommend raising rates even more, eventually to \$3.25.

The protesters felt somehow hoodwinked, given that they'd accepted council's word that the issue would be revisited, wrongly believing a second look at the issue would result in a reversal of the budget decision.

Yes, Sunday churchgoers scored a minor victory, with paid parking on Sunday getting nixed, but the rest went home pretty much empty-handed.

With council dealing with the matter tomorrow at council, some local businesses have declared today Black Tuesday and will be donning black ribbons to protest any change to the parking bylaw.

The issue itself, or at least the reaction it's received, is hard to understand.

The increases, including extending the timeframe of metered parking and where the meters are placed, passed quickly at budget time, frankly with little resistance.

It wasn't until Kitchissippi Coun. Christine Leadman moved to have her colleagues reconsider the hikes that the public took notice. By then, the budget was set and the parking money had been built into the tax rate of 4.9%.

You can be sure some of the representatives of outlying areas thought it was a good way to make a few quick bucks without affecting their residents.

Sure, why wouldn't West Carleton-March Coun. Eli El-Chantiry take the money grab?

Turns out El-Chantiry's residents do go downtown and aren't too happy about what is being described by many as nothing but a tax grab.

As Leadman points out, budget time isn't supposed to be about changing city policy.

Yet, that's what's happened.

That, in part, is why politicians like Leadman and Mayor Larry O'Brien, along with the likes of Bank St. BIA head Gerry Le-Page, are calling for a parking authority to take over responsibility for such issues.

Now, that's a bit of common sense. It makes you wonder why it hasn't happened up to now.

Maybe it makes too much sense.

Last week, councillors on the transportation committee spent the entire day reviewing the parking meter issue.

Does that really make sense? Of course not.

"We've been talking about (a parking authority) since 1992. A parking authority isn't encumbered by the bureaucracy and they look at all kinds of options," said Leadman.

"Instead, we get the same nonsense over and over again. We have to have a body that has a lot more flexibility, not encumbered by restrictions staff has."

CONTRAVENE LAW

A consortium of Ottawa business associations have hired a lawyer and yesterday sent city solicitor Rick O'Connor a letter telling the city they believe the changes contravene the city's own traffic and parking bylaw.

"The proposed changes are improperly aimed at increasing general revenues for the city as opposed to the regulation and control of parking issues," the letter reads, adding they are prepared to challenge the changes.

And in a memo sent by city manager Kent Kirkpatrick to councillors yesterday and obtained by the Sun, he suggests several options to counteract the loss of revenue created by the elimination of Sunday metered parking and a reduction in the times they would operate.

Those options include increasing parking fines in fire lanes to \$125 from \$100 and parking on private property to \$70 from \$60.