

# The Parking Manager is In



0 + 2  
ing Se  
ate go  
ate go  
y permi

**STILL FREE**  
First Hour 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**STILL FREE**  
after 6 p.m.

**STILL FREE**  
all day Sat. & Sun.

Visit [epark Eugene.com](http://epark Eugene.com)  
for more information  
or to send comments.

**epark**  
EUGENE, OREGON



# Turning parking lemons into community lemonade in Eugene, Ore.

By Jeff Petry

Remember Lucy's stand from the cartoon, "Peanuts?" Instead of dispensing a sweet drink, she offered customers the chance to unload and try to figure things out. We recently brought her concept to life in Eugene, Ore., had a great time doing it, and connected with our community in more ways than we anticipated.

The city's parking program used a classic lemonade stand to gather feedback on its first proposed parking rate increases in 20 years. The goals of the lemonade stand were to generate curiosity while raising awareness of upcoming changes, stimulate conversations about parking, and garner a smile from the community. During the public comment period, our lemonade stand was strategically placed around the downtown core in areas that had high pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The lemonade stand outreach was a success in communicating with the community about the rate changes, and the image of the stand presented the parking program in a way that our community continues to remember.

The lemonade stand was an invitation to the downtown community to talk about our proposed parking rate changes, but it was also an opportunity to just sit back, smile,

and talk about whatever was on one's mind. By putting a face on the parking program, the lemonade stand addressed a comment made by a downtown business owner that he had a "hate/love relationship with an inanimate object: the parking meter." Parking touches many lives everyday in creating parking turnover to encourage economic activity, or enhancing neighborhood livability. It can often be perceived, however, as just pumping money into a street-side meter or finding one's vehicle with a citation on the windshield. The lemonade stand with a sign announcing that the "Parking Manager is In" provided the opportunity to talk with the people behind the parking meters.

## How it Worked

Our normal process for engaging public comment for an administrative rate change



### Eugene Downtown Rate History

	Hourly Rate	All Day Rate	Avg Monthly Permit	Permit Switch*
<b>1988</b>	Free	Free	\$22.66	
<b>1991</b>	\$0.50	\$3.50	\$25.90	7
<b>1996</b>	\$0.65	\$3.50	\$36.00	10
<b>2000</b>	\$0.75	\$3.50	\$41.50	12
<b>2011</b>	\$0.75	\$3.50	\$49.00	14
<b>2012</b>	\$1.00	\$6.00	\$49.00	8

\*Average monthly permit divided by all day rate; or the number of days before it makes sense to switch from paying the all day rate and just buying a monthly permit.

included a long series of conversations and meetings with the mayor and city council, downtown business association, and downtown neighborhood association to understand the parking fund situation. We mailed 2,000 postcards to every address around parking meters and parking garages to announce the rate change, provide directions to learn more about it, and explain how to provide feedback. A formal letter was sent to the mayor and council the week before Labor Day. The local paper ran a front-page, above-the-fold article on the proposed rate increase, and the local TV. media ran

hood residential parking permit areas, off-street lots and structures, maintenance, and enforcement. However, its primary service delivery area is the downtown and the campus parking district. Each area is about two square miles. Downtown has a focus on business activity, while the campus district is home to University of Oregon and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Parts of our downtown have struggled during the last two decades, which has contributed to the lack of a rate increase. In fact, the city actually removed 12 blocks of paid-on-street parking and enabled two-hour

stories as well. We even reprogrammed our single-space meters with a screen that said “Proposed Rate Increase. \$1.50 to \$1.70/hour. Go to [www.eaparkeugene.com](http://www.eaparkeugene.com),” during the comment period.

After all this communication, we received 15 comments on the proposed rate change. This was very low, especially given that Eugene has a population of 155,000 residents and we process thousands of parking transactions every day. Either it was not a big deal, or we needed to reach out in a different way to our customers and the community. As a part of our communication plan, the lemonade stand provided a different avenue to engage our downtown community. It was important to have a face-to-face conversation about the proposed parking rate changes, especially given our history.

The City of Eugene installed parking meters in 1939, four years after the parking meter was invented, to discourage employee on-street parking and create parking space availability for customers. The suburbanization of the 1970s led our downtown businesses to convert from a customer paid-on-street meter system to a free-to-the-customer, business-paid-on-street, time-limited system. The business community taxed itself to pay the city to enforce parking time limits for customer use. At that time, the city also started building the first of six downtown parking structures to compete with the ample lots at suburban malls.

In 1991, our downtown reverted to a customer-paid parking system. The rates we set at that time have largely gone on unchanged until this year—that’s 21 years of unchanged rates!

The city has been able to keep downtown parking rates low for so long because it operates a parking enterprise fund that includes revenue (and expenses) from on-street parking, including meters and neighbor-

time-limited parking instead for a period of two years. The goal was to revitalize this underdeveloped section of downtown by removing the parking barrier—perceived or real—of customers not coming to this part of downtown. We wanted customers to give local businesses their quarters instead of giving them to the city’s parking fund.

All of these factors contributed to the non-traditional public outreach model of the lemonade stand. Based on the “Peanuts” cartoon, the stand was built from old fence board. It was placed around downtown for three days first thing in the morning, with the wooden sign

reading “Out” and showing posted times of when the parking manager would be “In” the stand. The local paper reporter and photographer came and sat with me for an extended period of time. They listened to the conversations, asked questions, and ran a second story on the parking rate increase, but this time with the headline, “Parking manager puts friendly face behind touchy subject,” and a photo of me talking with a customer.

### Interview Stand

The parking manager lemonade stand came back a second time during our recent parking enforcement officer hiring process. Our focus was to find individuals who could deliver exceptional customer service under stressful conditions. We had nine parking enforcement officers and sought to fill three vacant positions from an initial applicant pool of 500. After scoring for minimum qualifications, the applicant pool was reduced to 320 applicants. Another manager and I scored the 320 applicants on two open-ended questions, including, “How does a parking program contribute to a livable city?” While the human resources department would have allowed us to narrow the candidate pool down to a dozen for formal interviews, I decided to gather a little more information on the applicants through quick interviews.

We held 10-minute speed interviews (just three questions) that used the lemonade stand for the interview space. We set it up in a parking garage’s sweeper bay off of a downtown alley. The alley happened to be shared with our local county elections office, which was quite busy during our interviews at the end of October and beginning of November. Adding to the buzz was the normal alley traffic of garbage collection and vehicles, plus the coming and going of residents who lived in the apartments above the garage and the next-door business that had fitness classes running around the block that



The postcard mailed to Eugene residents and business before their parking rate change took effect.

Others just went with it, feeling fully comfortable regardless of the environment. Some were a little out of sorts. One candidate was truthful and simply said, “This is the weirdest interview I have experienced.”

This unconventional approach narrowed our candidate pool to the top nine candidates. It was key to our next iteration of parking enforcement officers who are not only employed to write citations to enforce the black-and-white municipal parking code. The city looks for parking enforcement officers who have excellent customer service skills and are trusted to operate in the gray area that seeks to encourage economic activity and enhance neighborhood livability.

### Coming Up

We plan to keep the lemonade stand for future uses. The City of Eugene attends summer neighborhood-sponsored parties to sell residential parking permits, and the stand will be set up where our residential parking permits are sold. At the end of November, we unveiled our “Step into Stories” project that placed four-foot-by-four-foot flash fiction story panels (200 words or less) from local Eugene authors on each stairway landing in a downtown parking garage. The lemonade stand was there, too, and we use it to offer free coffee and doughnuts to downtown construction workers who are redeveloping our downtown.

The parking lemonade stand has proven a big success. It provided an out-of-the-box method to engage our busy downtown community that has left a lasting impression. While the rate increase announcement is fading in the customer’s memory, the parking manager in a lemonade stand image remains fresh. We continue to receive feedback from the community that it was cool idea. Therefore, the parking lemonade stand achieved an even bigger goal: it contributed to the creative fabric that makes downtown a unique core of our community.

included the alley. It was a pretty good replication of the distractions that a parking enforcement officer experiences on the street.

When a candidate was brought into the sweeper bay for a quick interview, they encountered the lemonade stand with a chair in front for the interviewee to use and two chairs behind for the two interviewers. Part of the interview process was seeing how our potential candidates reacted to this creative approach. Many laughed and said it was simply awesome.



**JEFF PETRY** is parking services manager for the City of Eugene, Ore. He can be reached at [jeff.t.petry@ci.eugene.or.us](mailto:jeff.t.petry@ci.eugene.or.us) or 541.682.5079.