

Paterson Times

Dozens of new parking spaces created to accommodate downtown shoppers

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More than 75 new parking meters have been installed along downtown Main Street to accommodate the increased need for street parking in the city's main shopping district.

"It's a concerted effort to bring the people closer to the stores in the downtown area," said Tony Perez, director of the Paterson Parking Authority. Towards the end of November, the authority installed the meters, following requests from area merchants.

"It's something the merchants have asked for every year," said Sheri Ferreira, director of the Downtown Paterson Special Improvement District. This year with mayor Jose "Joey" Torres the merchants got their wish.

Torres said there is an effort to revitalize the downtown by not only offering discounted parking to local shoppers, but also refitting the top floors of the retail establishments to potentially attract members of millennial generation. Millennial, a sought demographic group of young people, who prefer to dwell in cities as opposed to the suburbs, are breathing new life into dying cities throughout the United States.

Ferreira said the meters, just steps outside of retail establishments, adds an added advantage for area merchants. She said a store owner will now be able to tell his customers they can park right outside the store.

“Those stores are the type of stores that sell \$5 to \$10 pieces of merchandise,” said Ferreira. “To have a customer go to a parking lot to pay \$4 or \$3 for the first hour of parking is just not fair to merchants that are selling products that are \$5 to \$10.”

With a few quarters customers will be able to park for a whole hour in front of their favorite store, said Perez.

The additional meters along the avenue has increased traffic problems in the downtown, a problem Perez said the authority is working to address. He also said loading and unloading issues have emerged, another issue the authority is working to address.

There are also questions of whether the authority has the power to install meters on a county road.

“Although it is a county road, we’ve never gone to the county for permission because, as far as I understand, the municipality controls the road,” said Perez. “It’s a city road and the municipality has control over city roads,” said Perez.

He said the authority has permission to install meters on city roads from the council through an ordinance that was passed some time ago.

Perez said Main Street in downtown has never had meters for decades save for a small portion between Smith and Ward Streets. That small section was rendered free of meters during the first year of mayor Jeffery Jones’ reign in office. Several businesses shut down as a result.

Merchants and officials are hoping the meters will help revitalize the downtown. To some extent the meters have begun to bring more people into downtown stores.

“What I do notice now when I walk up and down Main Street is people getting in and out of their cars with shopping bags,” said Ferreira. She said the meters make the street more shopper friendly and provide convenient parking for customers.

“The vibrancy is starting to come back,” added Perez.

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