



Calgary Chamber urges City to "park the fee increases"

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Concerned about the impact to downtown and area businesses, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce urged City Council to reconsider recent parking fee increases, as part of a series of Calgary Herald interviews in the past two weeks.

"The Chamber is concerned about the timing of these, and other rate increases during a period where many families and businesses are cutting back," said Geoff Pradella, Vice President, Public and Government Affairs with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. "It is especially troubling after the double digit property tax increase in City Council's recent budget."

On Jan. 4, the Calgary Parking Authority raised the hourly rate for street parking downtown to \$5 from \$4 and hourly spots in downtown parkades to \$6.50 an hour, up from \$6. This week, rates were raised in areas surrounding the city's core by up to 50 per cent. It now costs \$2.25 an hour to park in Kensington, Uptown 17 and Mission.

In the most expensive parkade downtown, the James Short at 1st Street and 4th Avenue S.W., parking now costs \$465 per month, up from \$430. Parking here costs more than it does for a modest monthly car payment and insurance.

"City council should be setting the bar for parking accessibility - cost recovery, not profit, should be the focus," stated Pradella.

The Chamber believes the city should not be in the business of earning a profit from its citizens. The Calgary Parking Authority's 2009 projections show \$65 million in surpluses since 2007.

"We urge City Council to roll back the parking rate increases and concentrate on improving transit," said Ben Brunnen, in-house economist, and Manager, Policy and Research at the Chamber.

"This move will hurt Calgary's international competitiveness, and new businesses will only come to the city if their people and goods can be transported cost-efficiently," explained Brunnen.

The Calgary Parking Authority justified the rate increases based on a benchmarking analysis of 27 private parking operators which indicated an average hourly rate of \$7.20.

"Great cities are accessible to everyone. If council increases parking fees, it should improve transit access. The situation where riders are crammed in C-train cars and waiting 45 minutes for buses is not acceptable."