



BETHLEHEM PARKING AUTHORITY

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Bethlehem Parking Authority Launches "ParkBethlehem"

The Bethlehem Parking Authority (BPA), in collaboration with and with support from the Downtown Bethlehem Association and the SouthSide Arts District, is excited to unveil "ParkBethlehem," a parking management initiative designed to optimize on-street parking in downtown areas.

ParkBethlehem, a first for Bethlehem, introduces a data-driven, demand-based approach to parking management. This pioneering program aims to enhance parking turnover and accessibility by implementing a two-tier parking meter rate system and encouraging the use of the city's convenient parking garages. The initiative seeks to balance short-term and long-term parking needs in high-demand areas. Steven Fernstrom, Executive Director of the BPA, commented, "The program addresses persistent issues and decades of data showing inadequate on-street parking turnover and accessibility in our downtowns. This has led to drivers endlessly circling for a spot, resulting in frustration and increased congestion. Our goal is to finally correct these problems."

Key Features of ParkBethlehem:

1. Two-Tier Parking Meter Rate System:

- **RapidPark Zone:** Located in core downtown areas, this zone represents about 30% of the meter system and is perfect for shorter visits. It will feature a \$2.50 per hour rate with a maximum stay of two hours. This higher rate and shorter limit are designed to encourage turnover and ensure that more visitors can access convenient parking spaces.
- **FlexPark Zone:** Situated slightly further from the downtowns, this walkable zone maintains the existing \$1.50 per hour rate with a three-hour maximum stay. This approach helps reduce congestion in high-demand areas and supports a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

2. Park Once Initiative

- The BPA's parking garages still offer the ultimate in parking convenience. Under the program's "Park Once" initiative, parking garages provide a stress-free solution perfect for extended visits, with a rate of \$1.50 an hour and no time limits.





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3. Accessibility Improvements:

- The BPA is addressing long-standing concerns by significantly increasing the number of on-street metered parking spaces for persons with disabilities. Fatima Nabavian, Program Manager at the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living, praised the BPA's decision, saying, "We are happy with the BPA's decision. This initiative is a crucial step toward creating a more inclusive and accessible downtown. It reflects a thoughtful approach to addressing accessibility challenges and demonstrates a genuine commitment to the needs of all community members." The Owner of a coffee shop business in Downtown Bethlehem that employs individuals with disabilities also expressed support, stating, "As a business owner dedicated to diversity and inclusion, I strongly support this initiative. Increasing accessibility not only benefits everyone but also makes our community more welcoming and equitable for individuals with disabilities."

Each metered zone will feature updated signage, new stickers, and vibrant graphic wraps on parking equipment to help visitors and residents navigate the parking system more easily.

"In recent years, we've modernized our operations with technology aimed at enhancing convenience and efficiencies," explained Fernstrom. "Key initiatives include the introduction of over twenty 10-minute free Pick-Up and Loading Zones, offering the first half-hour free in all parking garages, piloting Smart Loading Zones, implementing low-cost evening permits, offering low cost permits specifically for downtown employees, and encouraging the use of the mobile app."

"We've also made substantial investments in our parking garages, enhancing them with improved lighting, state-of-the-art gated equipment with multiple access options and license plate readers, garage mobile payment options, and convenient parking validation services. Additionally, we've rolled out reservation-based parking and also partnered with Google Maps and Waze for seamless parking reservations directly from Google search results and directions."

"These advancements have laid the groundwork for the launch of ParkBethlehem," he concluded.

Community Support:

The program was shaped by feedback from the business community, with the BPA holding numerous meetings with business leaders and local organizations. The input received led to notable adjustments, such as the introduction of shorter maximum parking times for the RapidPark zone. This responsive approach led to the endorsement from local organizations, including The Downtown Bethlehem Association Board of Directors and the SouthSide Arts District Advisory Board.





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In their letter of support, The Downtown Bethlehem Association Board of Directors stated, “We urge you to seriously consider our perspective and support the implementation of this innovative parking management approach. The DBA stands ready to collaborate with your administration to create a more dynamic, accessible, and sustainable downtown Bethlehem.”

Similarly, in its own letter of support, the SouthSide Arts District Advisory Board has voiced its backing for the program, noting, “We firmly believe that the adoption of a demand-based parking meter rate system will be a win-win solution for the Southside Arts District and the city as a whole. This initiative aligns with our mission to nurture thriving businesses and cultivate an environment where new ventures can flourish.”

Fernstrom also highlighted the broader impact of the program, adding, “The increase in technology and efficiencies not only has enhanced the customer experience, but it also allows us to redirect crucial funding to the community. We’ve done this by increasing our contributions to community partners, improving public parks, beautifying the city with new Christmas décor, and introduced additional services like free shuttles for events to better manage transportation throughout Bethlehem.”

The implementation of ParkBethlehem underscores the BPA’s commitment to innovation and sustainability. By encouraging parkers to use appropriate zones based on their stay duration, the program aims to optimize parking availability, further supporting small businesses, and reduce urban congestion.

ParkBethlehem will be rolled out in phases starting September 3, 2024. For more information, please visit BethPark.org and follow the BPA on social media for updates.

