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Should Lansdale make short-term parking on Main Street permanent?

By Dan Sokil dsokil@21st-centurymedia.com @dansokil on Twitter
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A portion of normally busy Main Street in Lansdale is seen April 2 during the coronavirus.

Bob Keeler - MediaNews Group

LANSDALE — If you've tried to pick up some takeout from any of Lansdale's restaurants since the arrival of COVID-19, you may have noticed some short-term parking spaces on Main Street.

Should those spaces be made more permanent? That's a question council has begun to take up.

"We've all worked really hard to help our local businesses, and I want to commend everybody — I think we did a tremendous amount," said police Chief Mike Trail.

"We did such a good job, local businesses are asking us: 'Hey, can we keep some of these measures in place?'" he said.

As Montgomery County has allowed restaurants and other businesses to reopen in recent weeks, Lansdale's staff, including police, management and the code enforcement department, have all met with business owners to discuss their needs, such as the closure of part of Wood Street for outdoor dining, Trail told council on July 1. One main request that has come forward from those discussions has been to keep, at least for the near-term, a handful of parking spaces on Main Street available for those picking up orders.

"Currently, those spaces exist as a result of the emergency declaration. When that declaration is lifted, the ordinance that regulates parking on Main Street would now come into effect," Trail said.

"Which means: all the spots on Main Street are metered parking, for however many hours and/or minutes are there. If council would like to entertain the idea of creating 15-minute parking on Main Street for businesses — which I don't object to — it needs to come in the form of an ordinance," he said.

Councilwoman Meg Currie Teoh asked if those spaces would be designated for use by any specific business, and Trail said they could not.

"We've identified some areas where we think we could do this, and it would have minimal impact, but would also allow for those businesses that desire 15-minute parking to have it," he said.

Borough Manager John Ernst added that under the borough's current emergency declaration, six spots have been designated as, "for lack of a better term, curbside pick-up," and the draft ordinance could cut that number by two.

"If we move, or when we move, out of the emergency declaration, and we move toward the creation of an ordinance, should council decide to do that, I believe we talked about reducing that number to four," he said.

Similar talks have been held by the borough's Economic Development Committee, the manager added, and EDC could put forward formal proposals to council in August.

"That group has heard from a couple of business owners about their thoughts regarding the potential for permanent, designated parking," said Ernst.

"I think the business community is looking to EDC to continue the conversation a little further," he said.

Mayor Garry Herbert asked how enforcement of the short-term parking spaces would be handled. Trail said his department has had experience enforcing similar limits in the designated permit parking zones near the town's main train station, and on Madison Street where new short-term spaces were added as apartments were built atop the former parking lot there.

"We think we've done a very good job of enforcing it, as best we can," Trail said.

"If we earmark the spots properly, and do a significant amount of enforcement, we can make changes much like we've seen on Madison Street," he said.

Since talks on short-term parking began in earnest in mid-June, according to the chief, he has had officers monitor the spots already designated for short-term parking, "and I've seen those spots be free 80 percent of the time."

"I know we're turning cars over. It's a challenge, but we can do it," he said.

Lansdale's borough council next meets at 7 p.m. on July 15 and the economic development committee next meets at 6:30 p.m. on July 20; for more information visit www.Lansdale.org.

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