

Ludington city officials note Stearns Park parking fees idea investigated, not yet proposed

Feb 21, 2017

Some Ludington city councilors recently brought up the idea of charging parking fees at Stearns Park for non-residents as a way to overcome a potential future deficit.

Community members have been commenting on the issue, and today, city of Ludington officials sent a press release.

City Manager John Shay said once "the research is completed and considering the public's input, the city council could decide to reject the idea outright."

Shay's release is as follows:

"A lot of interest has been generated over the idea of the City of Ludington charging non-city residents to park at Stearns Park. Here are the facts.

On Nov. 21, 2016, the city's Finance Committee met to review the proposed 2017, 2018, and 2019 budgets. These budgets showed that the General Fund's estimated expenditures would significantly exceed the General Fund's estimated revenues by about \$264,400 in 2018 and by about \$125,200 in 2019. The city's General Fund, which receives most of its revenues from property taxes paid by city residents, pays for the maintenance of all of the City's parks, including Stearns Park. The city's 2017 budget for all of its parks, beach safety, and boat ramps totals \$496,800. In response to this information, the Finance Committee discussed ideas on how to balance the 2018 and 2019 budgets. One of the ideas that was discussed was to look at charging non-city residents to park at Stearns Park.

• At the Dec. 19, 2016 city council meeting, the city council approved the 2017 budget. The city council expressed concern about the potential budgets in 2018 and 2019. It discussed some of the ideas, which were discussed at the Finance Committee, including the idea of charging non-city residents for parking at Stearns Park. The city

council stated that city residents already pay for the maintenance of all of the city's parks through their property taxes, and it did not want to further increase this financial burden on city taxpayers. However, many non-city residents use and enjoy the city's parks, but do not contribute financially at all towards the maintenance and upkeep of the parks. At this city council meeting, the city council asked the city manager to research how other communities charge for parking at public parks/beaches.

- **On January 24, 2017, the city manager presented information to the Parks Committee on how other lakeshore communities in Michigan charge the public for parking at public parks and beaches. Some of the other communities that currently charge to park at public parks/beaches include Empire, South Haven, Ottawa County, Saugatuck, St. Joseph, and New Buffalo. While each of their parking fee programs varies, for the most part, these communities charged non-residents either a daily parking fee or an annual parking sticker. The parking fees were usually in effect between Memorial Day and Labor Day and between approximately 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. The Parks Committee requested the City Manager to conduct additional research on this idea. The committee also felt that this was a big enough issue that the entire city council should discuss it as part of a workshop at some point in the future.**

- **The city is still conducting the research on this issue. It must be emphasized that there are currently no proposals to charge for parking at any park in the city of Ludington. The city is simply researching this idea, which was discussed at an open meeting of the city council late last year. If and when a proposal on this topic is developed, the city council will seek public input from as many sources as possible before making any decisions.”**