

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM on your dial in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant with news and commentary for Tuesday, May 20, 2025.

The parking controversy continues, with the lot in front of Don's Pharmacy and the Quimper Mercantile converting to paid parking. The move was not formally announced to the public; the notification was made through several signs on the lot instructing people to pay to park through a QR code. The paid conversion affects more than 100 spaces, from the Flagship Landing shopping center to US Bank, adjacent to the ferry dock.

The announcement has already caused a stir on social media, with many people stating this is the end to Port Townsend life as we once knew it. We made several attempts to contact the management company, Hall Equities Group in Walnut Creek, California, receiving a hard "no comment" to all queries. And we have no response as to what prompted this move, when it will begin, and how the enforcement process will work. While we don't have official answers to these questions we can extrapolate information from talking to some of the employees.

According to one person who requested anonymity, the move is meant to keep people from parking in the lot and shopping elsewhere. While many of us are guilty of parking in the lot and walking to concerts on the dock, that is not the target group. Rather, it is aimed at people use the lot while taking a ferry and leaving their car in the lot for days at a time. According to an email to retail staff, stores will have QR Code signage allowing customers to validate their parking (giving 1 hour free) and after the free hour the customer will be prompted to add more time if they are still shopping. Staff parking will remain free, although reserved spots for businesses will go away. The email acknowledges there will be an adjustment period for both staff and the general parking public.

The process requires customers to scan the QR code, enter their license plate number and submit payment through Apple Pay, PayPal, or a credit card. Rates are staggered, from \$4.40 per hour to \$26.25 until 8 am the following day. Presumably the system will do nothing to prevent people from parking in the lot and shopping elsewhere.

According to a source, the camera system will photograph plates and match them to their parking balance. Those exceeding their limit will receive a prompt to pay the balance through the app. Otherwise they will receive a mailed invoice for that balance. To this end, the Washington State Department of Licensing offers a contracted plate search, where qualified businesses can identify vehicles using a government database. A usage fee is assessed from these qualified entities, such as a paid parking lot. This prompts another question: whether people will respond to an invoice if their license renewal isn't in the balance.

The lot's conversion follows an unsuccessful attempt by the city to implement a paid parking pilot program downtown; it was defeated by public outcry. As a private entity, Hall Equities Group can do whatever it wants without running it by the public. The social media clusterdoodle includes many people who say they will not go downtown to shop if paid parking is required, instead shopping online or traveling to Poulsbo or Sequim to get their necessities. This seems short sighted – they are willing to burn half a tank of gas and two hours' time to save \$10. Still, Quimper Mercantile Assistant Manager Ronnie Harrell expects that the paid parking conversion will discourage some shoppers. As for discouraging tourism, it's unlikely that paid parking will make or break a visit to town, as several other towns around the region have downtown meters.

Washington residents will soon face heftier fines for littering. The fine will increase from \$103 to \$256, which includes all state-mandated charges, according to legislative staff. The fine would apply to amounts up to one cubic foot, or roughly the size of a backpack. The new law will take effect in late July, according to the Washington State *Standard*.

KPTZ brings you local news Tuesday through Thursday at noon and 5pm. To contact us, write news@kptz.org. This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.