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City council to consider raising parking meter rates



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Municipal leaders are considering a proposal to increase parking meter rates in some Boston areas — part of a larger effort to alleviate the city's congested streets.

At a city council hearing on Tuesday, Boston's chief of streets, Chris Osgood, said his department was working on a multi-pronged initiative that would direct new parking revenue toward community investment. Osgood did not give an exact figure for the proposed increase, but he said a "pilot program" would be presented to City Council by the end of the year.

Councilor Frank Baker had called the hearing to discuss options to improve the availability of city parking, which has become increasingly scarce in neighborhoods with rapid development. Osgood spoke, along with the city's Transportation Department commissioner, Gina Fiandaca, and a representative from the Boston Planning and Development Agency.

Early in the hearing, Councilor Bill Linehan gave an impassioned speech during which he smacked his hand against a table in frustration over the parking situation. He called access to adequate transportation and parking availability one of the central issues facing Boston.

"This is the issue," Linehan said. "It's going to run into everything else we do."

Councilor Michael Flaherty railed against the transportation officials for, from his perspective, failing to address another parking problem: the abuse of handicapped parking. Flaherty said he believes "suburban

folks” come into Boston with makeshift handicapped stickers, which they used avoid parking meters. “It’s a big problem,” Flaherty said. “We lose out on hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of dollars.”

But while some councilors focused on parking availability, others used the hearing to discuss issues of public transit and climate change.

City Council President Michelle Wu framed parking availability as an “environmental justice” issue, since cars that cannot find spots spew harmful emissions as they circle.

Some activists at the hearing asked the council not to focus on parking, but on creating incentives for residents to not drive at all. Stacy Thompson, the executive director of the community group LivableStreets Alliance, said councilors should not forget Boston’s pledge to improve open space and health by 2030.