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More handicap parking meters

Devices to be added in Fells Point and Harbor East in effort to stop placard theft

BY COLIN CAMPBELL
 The Baltimore Sun

Handicap parking meters will be unveiled in Baltimore's Fells Point and Harbor East neighborhoods next month, an expansion of the city Parking Authority's Project Space, which requires disabled drivers to pay for parking in an effort to stop theft of handicap placards.

The city will change 70 single-space parking meters into handicap-only, and lower 95 multi-space EZ Park meters throughout Fells Point and Harbor East to make them compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act, the Parking Authority said.

The time limit on all the included meters will be extended to four hours to allow drivers with disabilities more time to get to and from their destinations.

Project Space began in the downtown business district in 2014, retrofitting the area's multi-space meters and adding 200 accessible meters. The project makes parking rates for drivers with a disability placard or tag the same as those for parking without one to remove any incentive for stealing them. Handicap parking previously had been free.

The project also is designed to increase parking turnover by limiting the time drivers can park in any given space. Current policy in all other areas of the city allows for cars with disability placards to be parked free at city meters, leading to people leaving their cars there for long periods of time.

Due to the benefits, handicap placards were the top item stolen from vehicles

before the project began, according to the Parking Authority.

"Project Space has worked wonders in increasing the availability of on-street parking for individuals with disabilities, and reducing theft of disability placards from vehicles," Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said in a statement. "I am proud that this excellent program is expanding to other neighborhoods in the city, and look forward to more positive results."

The new meters, which will be rolled out Sept. 27, will be in the area bounded by Eastern Avenue to the north, Wolfe Street to the east, Thames Street to the south and the Inner Harbor waterfront near Pier Six to the west.

It eventually will expand further, to Federal Hill, Mount Vernon and beyond, the Parking Authority said.

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