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Visiting Harvard Square? Beware of Parking Meter Tickets

By Prithvi G. Tikhe

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. – If it's around 1 p.m. Wednesday and you are parked in a metered spot in Harvard Square, you probably already have a bright red ticket. You either stayed longer than the maximum allowable time limit or did not put enough money into the meter.

On July 24, 2017, for the first time since 2008, parking meter rates were raised in the city of Cambridge. The citywide base rate increased from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per hour while in the hot spot – the most ticketed place – Harvard Square, the price went up from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per hour. But in areas where demand is less, the hourly rate remains at \$1.00.

Chris Kotelly, owner of the Crimson Corner news stand, who drives to and from Harvard Square each day for work, and receives a few parking meter tickets every month said, “I think it's kind of excessive and some of my customers think it's too expensive; it definitely can add up to be a lot.”

A review of the [Cambridge parking ticket data](#) from January to May 2017 showed nearly 105,000 vehicles in the city were tagged with a ticket out of which 74,332 were for [parking meter violations](#).

Commercial streets around Harvard Square, such as Brattle, John F. Kennedy and Mt. Auburn streets, and Massachusetts Ave., which are famous for its tourism, shops and restaurants are “[hot spots](#)” for parking meter violations. Parking is limited in these areas, so the patrolling officers keep a close watch on metered parking.

Across the city, you are most likely to get a parking meter ticket [Tuesday through Friday](#), when parking enforcement is at its peak. Lesser tickets are issued on Mondays and Saturdays partly because there are fewer officers on duty. Data shows minimal meter tickets issued on Sunday when the meters are not in operation.

City data shows that the [time of day](#) matters when the risk of getting a ticket is increased. Least number of tickets are given out before 8 a.m. and after 8 p.m. when the meters aren't running. Maximum amount of parking tickets are issued from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. when most parking spaces are occupied and enforcement officers are on duty.

According to the [Cambridge Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department](#), increase in the meter rate in high demand parking areas of Harvard Square will encourage alternative modes of transportation to the business district. The city hopes to boost the economy as the new rate will promote faster turnover of these spaces to provide access to businesses in the area.

Denise Jillson, executive director of the Harvard Square Business Association, said she understood the city's reasoning for the parking meter raise, but at some point, felt parity is essential. She went on to say when the city keeps putting the economic responsibility on the business community, and thinks that it is not going to impact Harvard Square's vibrancy, the city is mistaken.

"Increasing the parking [cost] in a business district that's already feeling the effects of online purchasing in a very big way; it's impactful," Jillson said. "The city continues to then do things that are antithetical in some ways to creating or maintaining a robust business district."

Mark Chase who teaches transportation planning at Tufts University, said in a phone interview that even within the Harvard Square area there should be two prices – a "premium"

and an “economy” – because some spaces in the square are more in demand than others. The “price has to be right” relative to the “demand of the space.”

Josh Goldman, a Dorchester resident and an employee at Raven Used Books thinks parking is underpriced in Harvard Square.

In response to people’s concern over the meter price increase Goldman said, “They’re wrong; what can you do these days with \$1.25?”

Chase added that Cambridge will potentially lose money by charging more for meters. People will tend to comply more with the law, decreasing the number of parking meter violations, and at the same time increasing available spaces.

“When San Francisco priced parking based on demand, they saw ticket revenues decrease overall,” he said.

Conversely, Cambridge Parking Director Joseph Barr told WBUR's Newscast Unit in July that the rate hike will raise revenue for the city.

"The reality is, it is partly about trying to keep up with a lot of the new initiatives that we're doing — whether that's looking at bike lanes or whether that's looking at changes to pedestrian facilities," he said. "As we look forward, all those things cost money."

Parking tickets have become a significant source of [revenue](#) for Cambridge. The city generated about \$10.2 million in parking fines last year and projects to collect \$10.6 million in 2017.