How New Bedford could provide free parking for customers using City meters

Currently, New Bedford is providing two hours of free parking for many of the parking meters in downtown New Bedford. During my interview with Mayor Mitchell this past Wednesday, one of the business owners downtown voiced her happiness with the free parking and wanted to know how long it would last. Here is his response:

Mayor Mitchell pointed out that the two hours of free parking was temporary and would end soon, once the construction in the area of Union Street ends.

Convenient parking downtown became less numerous when **Mayor Mitchell converted about 60 public parking spots into today's Custom House park** near the water fountain on Union Street and accorss from Carter's Clothing and The Garden bar. Having more green space downtown came at a price — less parking in the heart of downtown New Bedford. Yes, there are two large parking garages downtown on Elm Street (**which the City has invested $5 million to upgrade recently**) and near the Zeiterion Theatre, but those are less convenient and further away from most of the downtown restaurants and retailers. Additionally, those 60 spots at Custom House Square were available for long-term parking — downtown meters have a limit of 2-hours.

During the past few holiday seasons, usually for the last 30-40 days of the year, the **Mitchell administration has provided free parking for those making a purchase at a downtown or Acushnet Avenue retailer**. Visitors to those areas are given two hours of free parking and if you go over that

time, just submit a receipt from a business with your ticket and the ticket cost is waived. It's a popular program, so why not do it every day of the year? The obvious answer would be a significant loss of revenue for the City. The City of New Bedford takes in about $1 million for parking fees and tickets.

It wouldn't be hard to implement a free parking program for customers as the City of New Bedford implemented a **smartphone app that allows you to scan a parking meter's QR Code**. Why not just provide the downtown and Acushnet Ave. businesses with their own QR Code and when visitor shops at their location scan it to waive the parking fee? I couldn't imagine it being too costly for the app developer to add this feature. An alternative would be to just submit your receipt with your ticket and have the ticket fee waived like the **free parking holiday program** allows.

What do you think? If you like the idea you can contact your New Bedford City Councilors **here**, message the mayor's office at Mayor.Mitchell@newbedford-ma.gov and leave a comment below!