

# **NO PARKING! — City councilmen, residents run out of patience with flawed parking-pass software - Online Registration/Renewal/Payment Program Causes Delays, Frustration For Area Residents**

By Stephen Janis and Alan Z. Forman, *Investigative Voice*, March 5, 2010

In the end, it was a constituent in her seventies who drove Baltimore City Councilman Bill Cole to the brink of frustration with the residential parking software. In an email to the freshman councilman, the woman told how a two-minute process online to pay for her residential parking pass had turned into a 45-minute ordeal.

"This is such a mess," said Cole, the day after he fired off an angry email to Baltimore City Parking Authority chief Pete Little asking him to junk the software that has been problematic since the city installed it last April.

"Enough is enough."

For years the Parking Authority used a program called Preferred Parking, made by a local company, which "worked perfectly," said Cynthia Griffin, a South Baltimore realtor who is the volunteer parking administrator for the neighborhood known as Area-30, south of the Inner Harbor, incorporating Federal Hill and its environs.

But since the city replaced the program with a new one called T2, provided by T2 Systems Inc., she said, "Nothing works.

"T2 was designed for college campuses," Griffin explained, where the only data required to be in the system is the vehicle's make and model, license number, and student's name and contact information.

"It was never meant to contain vast amounts of information needed in a parking program such as ours," which needs to allow for such things as multiple vehicles registered to one residence, visitors' passes, extended-day parking and the like, she explained.

## **ONE OF THE TWO LARGEST**

Area-30 is one of the two largest RPP (residential parking permit) areas in the city. The other is the Oakenshawe neighborhood, north of Union Memorial Hospital.

Like the Federal Hill area, which suffers from limited parking because of its business and commercial district as well as the downtown sports complexes, Oakenshawe's streets are narrow and congested, and residents often have to compete with hospital visitors for parking, despite Union Memorial's two paid-parking garages.

“The product is not adequate,” said Councilman Cole, a Democrat who represents the city’s 11th Councilmanic District. “It just isn’t going well. We have received 700-800 emails” complaining about the inadequacy of the T2 software.

“We had a product that was already working,” he said, and the Parking Authority inexplicably replaced it.

“This is such a mess. This has gone far enough.”

Council President Bernard C. “Jack” Young agrees, as does the council’s vice-president Edward Reisinger (D-10th), Young said. “Ed and I called for scrapping” the T2 software program “if it’s not fixed within the month,” Young told *Investigative Voice* in a telephone interview Wednesday evening.

“Councilman Reisinger told the [Parking Authority] Board to fix the program or scrap it within 30 days,” by the next board meeting, Young added, “and I agreed with him. The board was given 30 days’ notice as of their last meeting [February 17].”

The Parking Authority Board is next scheduled to meet March 17.

## **HEAVILY POPULATED RPP AREAS**

Cole and Reisinger represent districts with heavily populated residential parking permit areas, as did Young before he became council president last month.

In addition to their complaints about the software, one of the neighborhood volunteers, Bob Harkum, has resigned from the Parking Authority board of directors in protest. The board is comprised of five non-compensated members, four of whom are appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council, the fifth being a council member appointed by the council president. All serve three-year staggered terms.

The Parking Authority and its board were created in 1979, and the RPP program was developed principally to protect residents in congested city areas from unreasonable burden in gaining access to their residence. It is normal practice for neighborhood associations to set up such programs for their individual communities.

Baltimore City RPP area residents can go downtown to Parking Authority headquarters on West Lombard Street and register or renew their parking passes in person; however, for most people it is much more convenient to do it online.

Or at least it was, before the old software was replaced by T2.

Whenever residents of Area-30 complain, “We get the runaround most of the time,” lamented Debbie Alt, who chairs the South Baltimore Neighborhood Association. “The Parking Authority claims they’ve fixed a lot of the problems.”

But the T2 software, she said, is unable to search and cross-reference adequately or to recognize when there is more than one tenant in a house so that visitors' passes can be properly assigned, plus "it is unable to properly filter fraud and errors."

### **SYSTEM NOT USER-FRIENDLY**

The software also needs to be able to differentiate between a residence and a business, she explained, and to recognize when an address doesn't qualify — for example, that a business is not part of the residential parking program.

Alt said also that "the system is not user-friendly or intuitive," has no "shopping-cart" facility, and is "not functional with Apple computers."

"People with Macs can neither register nor pay online," she said.

In addition, she said, the T2 program was unable to transfer information properly from the old system to the new, thereby necessitating that the city expend "a tremendous amount of manpower hours to get the data in correctly."

"A lot of the data had to be manipulated and reentered by hand — allowing for spelling errors" of names and streets — and causing city employees "earning high salaries" to have to enter data by hand.

"They're still doing it," she said.

"Not one person at the Parking Authority that I know of — including [agency head] Peter Little — lives in Baltimore City," Alt said, "so they have no reason to have a sense of urgency to make things work."

When complaints are made, "they'll claim that it's important to them, but they just don't understand."

As for "the T2 folks," she said, "They're not hard to work with, they're just slow [to implement corrections]."

"This system stinks, stinks, stinks!"