

From: Kai Petainen
Sent: Wed 1/1/2014 1:54 AM
To: [multiple addressees]

Dear City Council,

Happy New Year and here is my first complaint of the year. The city wasn't ready for the Winter Classic. The main parking lot failed. The \$50 million library lot is an embarrassment. I thought it was cool and pretty, but after tonight, I realize that it doesn't function as a \$50 million lot should function. It failed. It didn't work. \$50 million or so was spent on it, and it malfunctioned.

After the puck drop tonight, I went to my car that was parked in the lot. We paid our fee and sat in the car. We sat for 45 minutes. From 12:15 to 1:00 we were in that lot - sitting. The lot wasn't full, as I noticed that the levels below me weren't full. So some might say that the lot failed because of the high capacity moving out of the lot - but that's not true. The lot wasn't full.

This is alarming, because supposedly people always complain about the lack of parking in Ann Arbor (I don't believe this is true)... but in a night when the entire downtown was full of people -- the parking lot was not full. Why do we keep building these lots when they aren't full? Why wasn't the library lot full tonight? How can we have such an expensive parking lot and such a big event downtown -- yet the lot isn't full?

Some might argue that the high capacity created problems, but that's another false statement. That lot was supposedly designed to handle a convention center and a hotel. It's supposed to be the #1 parking lot in downtown Ann Arbor. But, for a \$50 million lot, it doesn't work as a \$50 million lot should work.

I'd like to know what went wrong in that lot tonight. Why was the wait so long? What screwed up in the system that caused the problem? I heard that it ate some credit cards - is that true? Did it do this to any out-of-towners? If so, did anyone call the police?

Do you know that the wait was so long, that when I got to the ticket machine it wouldn't work. and I presume it didn't work as the machine would have wanted more money! And why did it want more money? Because I was sitting in line for 45 minutes! I bet that machine wanted me to pay more \$\$ for that 45 minutes I spent in the lot.

Here's the thing. If you build a world-class parking lot for \$50 million, then it should behave as such. This parking lot didn't. It failed during a major event in Ann Arbor.

I want a refund for my \$2.40. It's not a lot of money, but based on the principle that the parking lot didn't do what it was supposed to do, then I want a refund. It would be interesting to know how much \$\$ the parking lost tonight because it screwed up and didn't work as it should.

-kai petainen

From: Briere, Sabra [mailto:SBriere@a2gov.org]
Sent: Wednesday, January 01, 2014 9:32 AM
To: [multiple addressees]
Subject: RE: happy new year, but the library lot failed tonight

Dear Kai,

I'm sorry that the system didn't work. This is not the first time that the parking system has failed to adjust to many people wanting to leave the lot / parking structure at the same time. I can tell from your comments that you returned to the lot, paid for your parking at one of the kiosks, and then went to your car. So, clearly, did a number of people.

Those using the system can also pay at the machine on their way out, although there is no guarantee that trying this would have worked better.

As you note, putting the credit card in wrong can cause a significant delay - and a string of people trying to leave under these circumstances just makes things more difficult. In hindsight, setting a fixed rate for the entire night might have been a better idea - and collecting the funds before the festivities would have saved a lot of added frustration.

I've copied Susan Pollay on this message. I'm certain the Council will want a report on parking - one that covers all of December and shows what went right, and what changes need to be made in the future. Today will also be a challenge, as parking has (always) been free on holidays.

Thank you for letting us know about this.

Sabra

Sabra Briere
First Ward Councilmember
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Emails received and sent to me as a Councilmember regarding City matters are generally subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

From: Susan Pollay <SPollay@a2dda.org>
Date: Wed, Jan 1, 2014 at 12:06 PM
Subject: RE: happy new year, but the library lot failed tonight
To: [multiple addressees]

Dear Ms. Petainen. I'm sorry to hear about your experience in the Library Lane parking structure last night. I will check in with Republic Parking to find out more about what happened so I can provide a more detailed response. For the moment, let me share what I do know:

1. Republic Parking was fully staffed last night knowing that downtown would be filled with revelers enjoying themselves on New Year's Eve.
2. This was the first year in recent memory in which a major event was planned in downtown on New Year's Eve, so there was no way to know just how large the audience would be. I spent the hours leading up to midnight with the Executive Director and several board members of the Ann Arbor Convention and Visitors Bureau, and heard from many of them that they thought the size of the audience may have exceeded estimates they had developed during the planning of the event.
3. Republic Parking had a pre-pay system in place at the Fourth & William and Forest parking structures to help patrons avoid lines at cashiers. At the Library Lane structure there are no cashiers, but instead there is an automated pay-on-foot system, where patrons pay before getting to their car or use the credit card in-out equipment. In addition Republic Parking has "ambassadors" at the pay stations and exits to help patrons who may not be familiar with the equipment. For many events these options have worked well to help smooth exiting. I'm not sure why this system did not work last night, and I will talk with Republic Parking to get some specific details about why such a long back up occurred at Library Lane.
4. Like many of the public parking structures, Library Lane has many hundreds of monthly parking permit holders. These monthly parking permits provide these patrons with a guaranteed 24/7 access to the structure, which means that even during big events like last night, a quantity of parking spaces may appear "unsold". The parking structure is well-utilized, and is an asset for the Library and businesses in the midtown area.
5. Regarding your concern about exhaust fumes, like all underground parking structures, Library Lane has fans to push fumes out of the garage and to draw fresh air into the garage. As part of this system, you can see large fans as you walk Library Lane and the alley, and the large "P" parking signs on Fifth and Division double as exhaust pipes.

Again, my sincere apologies for your frustration last night. We strive to provide excellent service, and despite a great deal of planning for last night, there was a back up at Library Lane. I will speak with Republic Parking's General Manager tomorrow to find out more about what took place last night, and will be sure to get back ahold of you with more information.

Susan Pollay, Ann Arbor DDA

From: SPollay@a2dda.org
To: [multiple addressees]
Subject: RE: happy new year, but the library lot failed tonight
Date: Mon, 6 Jan 2014 19:43:23 +0000

Dear Mr. Petainen. Thank you again for taking time to contact the DDA last week about your experience in the Library Lane parking structure on New Year's Eve. Since my last email I've had a chance to talk with the head of the Ann Arbor Republic Parking office to learn more about what took place.

Republic Parking had anticipated a big crowd that night and was fully staffed. During the period of 12:15am and 1:30am they reported that 237 cars exited the structure, and at its peak more than 5 cars were exiting per minute. Reviewing their equipment records, they said that during this period most patrons were able to exit the structure within 15-20 minutes; but your experience made it clear that there was a problem of some kind. Republic Parking checked and they did not have any equipment malfunctions. Further, they let me know that they had experienced staff members at the exits and at the pay stations to assist patrons.

Republic Parking did note that a choke point developed where traffic comes up from P2 and traffic is going to the Division Street exit. It is quite likely that once things stalled at this point, it took several minutes to get the line moving again.

We will work with Republic Parking to address this, including adding more signage to help direct patrons through this area more smoothly, and perhaps having staff members standing in this location at the conclusion of big events to help direct traffic flows. I also conveyed your suggestion about using a \$5/pre-pay at Library Lane during big events such as we had on New Year's Eve, as this pre-pay system appeared to work well at the 4th & William and Forest structures.

We will certainly include this as part of future event planning.

Again, my heartfelt apology for your experience on New Year's Eve. I'm very grateful you took time to let us know about this, as it will help a great deal with future planning for big events.

Susan Pollay

From: Kai Petainen
Date: Thu, Jan 9, 2014 at 7:59 PM
Subject: RE: happy new year, but the library lot failed tonight
To: [multiple addressees]

Susan,

Thanks so much for your email.

One quick thought:

"During the period of 12:15am and 1:30am they reported that 237 cars exited the structure, and at its peak more than 5 cars were exiting per minute"

More than likely, the peak occurred closer to 1am. When I approached the structure, I don't remember seeing any cars or people blocking the roads that led from the parking lot. I also don't remember seeing any people at the pay station inside, or at the gate (when I arrived from the main street party). When I exited the structure, I finally saw two people helping -- 1 knew how to manually raise the gate, and the other did not (she asked the other to teach her how to do it). I don't think the backlog came from cars or people on the road.

That being said, I do like your email a lot. It's a great email, as I felt you listened to my concern and you responded. That's actually great customer service and I'm thankful. So my email is more of a thanks, than that of a complaint.

I should note that more things went right than wrong during the winter classic. A few days ago I was in a taxi ride in Toronto. The taxi driver had been to the game! I actually heard overheard others (strangers) talking about it as well! I heard them at the Tim Hortons, at the airport and on the street. The event was a big deal to Toronto, as much as it was a big deal to Ann Arbor. With all the bad stuff that has been happening in Toronto (with their mayor and massive power interruptions), the game was a huge bright spot for their city. Actually, most of the complaints I've heard, dealt with the mistakes that were made with regard to food. The event really screwed up on food. Frozen beer, not enough hot chocolate and hungry patrons on a cold day -- not good. The taxi cab driver was a bit annoyed though, as he thought the puck drop was at Comerica and not Ann Arbor. But he loved the event and Ann Arbor.

So, thank you so much for your email. Beautifully written and I thank you for listening to me.

-kai

Kai Petainen
Ann Arbor, Michigan