



Parking tickets up 70 percent in first 2 months of 2017

Weather, new enforcement system cited as factors



TIM STUHLREHER | Staff Writer Mar 29, 2017



RICHARD HERTZLER | Staff Photographer

A city parking enforcement officer places a ticket on a vehicle in the first block of West Orange Street Tuesday afternoon.

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Parking tickets were up sharply in the two months after the Lancaster Parking Authority took over a major share of enforcement duties from city police.

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There were 18,188 tickets issued in January and February, up 70 percent from the 10,716 issued during the same period in 2016.

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Officials say more consistent enforcement is part of the reason. But they caution against reading too much into the data, because weather likely played an important role, too.

The snowstorm of January 2016 affected enforcement for weeks, Patrick Hopkins, the city's director of administrative services, said.

By comparison, the 2016-17 winter was mostly mild. Previous mild winters have yielded numbers similar to this year's, Hopkins said.

That said, it's now harder than before to avoid a ticket, especially in the late afternoon and on Saturdays, when the risk used to be little to none.

"The quantity and zeal of the enforcement officers appears to have doubled," city resident Ron Mundy said.

Shared jurisdiction

These days a ticket can come from police or a Parking Authority employee.

The authority is putting fewer enforcement personnel on the street than the police used to, "but we are enforcing consistently," Executive Director Larry Cohen said.

Under the old system, officers' shifts ended at 4:30 p.m., and they sometimes were pulled away to handle traffic control or other duties.

Parking Authority staff don't have those responsibilities, and enforcement lasts until 6 p.m.

Meanwhile, police are sending officers out daily, Sgt. Manuel Luciano said.

The police bureau's former enforcement aides are now known as patrol service aides. There are seven of them, tasked with proactive enforcement, Luciano said.

The Parking Authority has three main responsibilities: the residential parking-permit program, meter parking (including kiosks) and street sweeping.

Typically, between two-thirds and three-quarters of tickets issued are for the latter two infractions.

The police personnel are on the lookout for other violations, such as parking in handicapped spots, in front of fire hydrants or in loading zones.

They also handle traffic control during police incidents and public events.

The new normal

Cohen said he expects ticket numbers to ebb somewhat as people get used to regular enforcement and pay more consistently.

One sign that people's habits are changing: Use of the Parking Authority's pay-by-phone app has increased. There were more than 8,000 transactions in January and February, versus fewer than 2,400 over the same period last year.

People are realizing they can use the app to add more time if they need it, Cohen said.

No matter who issues a ticket, the Parking Authority is the first stop for payments, questions and all customer service matters, Cohen said.

The exception would be an emergency situation, such as a blocked fire hydrant or driveway or a handicapped space. For those, people should contact city police, he said.

The fines being collected this year reflect new, higher rates for several violations. It often takes a while for people to pay their fines, so more money is expected to come in from tickets issued in January and February.

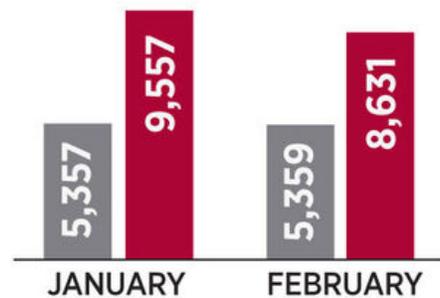
To cover its expenses, the authority retains a small percentage of the fines it collects, plus a management fee. The remainder goes to the city.

CITY PARKING ENFORCEMENT

The number of tickets issued in Lancaster is up 70 percent this year compared with 2016. The amount collected is up less, 51 percent, but the 2017 amounts will continue to grow as past-due fines are paid.

TICKETS ISSUED

● 2016 ● 2017



FINES COLLECTED

● 2016 ● 2017



SOURCES: CITY OF LANCASTER, LANCASTER PARKING AUTHORITY

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Lancaster Parking Authority

Address: 30 W. Orange St., Lancaster.

Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Phone: (717) 299-0907. If calling after business hours, leave a message, and someone will get back to you. Messages are monitored by staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Meter parking

Rates: 25 cents per 10 minutes, 2-hour time limit.

Hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

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