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Free parking for hybrids and fuel-efficient cars

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By Jennie Miller
 C & G Staff Writer

FERNDALE — Meter-feeding is now a thing of the past for owners of hybrids or high gas mileage vehicles who wish to park on the streets of Ferndale.

Members of the Ferndale City Council approved a measure July 24, at the request of Councilman Craig Covey, that exempts fuel-efficient and hybrid vehicles from normal parking charges.

"I look at this as somewhat symbolic," Covey said. "It makes a point that we as a society have to start thinking about the ramifications of the choices we make. Its one small step one small city can take, as Ferndale has done many times."

Under the proposal, Ferndale residents may obtain a permit for free on-street parking at a cost of \$8 per year, per fuel-efficient vehicle. Residents who live outside of Ferndale, but frequently patronize the city's downtown venues, may purchase a permit at a cost of \$25 per year, per fuel-efficient vehicle.

The city is expected to approve a complete list of all eligible vehicles at its next regular meeting, Aug. 14. The program will begin Sept. 1.

Over the course of the discussion of this measure, city officials have received both negative and positive feedback from residents.

"Some people think it's the greatest idea council has come up with in awhile, and some think it's downright stupid," said Councilman Scott Galloway.

But Covey, who himself owns a gas-guzzling sport-utility vehicle, is thinking of the future.

"My SUV is as big as yours, and I know the pain of that," Covey said. "I do not have a hybrid, but I would like to own one. We've got to start thinking long-range. We, as a society, cannot burn (fuel) the way we do. Maybe this is one more step to help push us all in the right direction."

But Councilman Michael Lennon couldn't agree to the proposal, deeming it unfair to low-income folks who can't afford the higher priced fuel-efficient cars, and to people who need to use trucks and SUVs for work or other purposes.

"It's not fair across the board," Lennon said. "I can't support this."

It was approved by a vote of 4-1.

"This is a bold step," said Ferndale Mayor Robert Porter.

One that is being commended by members of the Sierra Club.

"Sierra Club applauds the city of Ferndale for creating the free-parking incentive to drivers of hybrids and fuel-efficient vehicles," said Melissa Damaschke, Sierra Club conservation organizer. "Currently, drivers of vehicles that average 40 miles per gallon or more save over \$2,200 at the gas pump over the lifetime of his/her vehicle, and reduce U.S. global warming pollution by close to 600 million tons. Free parking is another great reason to purchase a vehicle that gets better gas mileage, is easier on our wallets, and is better for the air we breathe."

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