

## **Double parking: Lower the fine or the ax**

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Few things get the blood boiling like double parking. You roll down the street and there is some vehicle with its tail lights flashing, blocking your way.

You slam on the brakes and mutter to yourself, "Why doesn't that bozo park around the corner?"

That presumes there is space around the corner, which is often not the case in crowded city neighborhoods. Or it overlooks the fact that the driver is unloading the kids, the groceries or grandma in front of his or her home, instances in which maneuvering to get the shortest distance to the front door matters.

The Baltimore City Council has ventured into the emotional mine field of double parking. Three months ago, in a move to help plug the \$121 million hole in the city budget, it raised parking fines, including the one for double parking. The fine jumped from \$77 to \$250.

Recently, Councilmen James B. Kraft and William H. Cole, who represent Southeast and Central Baltimore neighborhoods where parking is scarce, have proposed lowering the fine to \$100. The councilmen report that constituents had recently been smacked with \$250 tickets when they were double-parked unloading groceries or depositing children.

Even at the proposed reduced rate, the fine for double parking in the city would be higher than the same offenses in surrounding jurisdictions. Phone calls to various offices found that in Baltimore County, the fine for double parking is \$52; in Howard County it is \$60; in Annapolis, \$50.

Many city residents also pay \$40 a year for a sticker permitting them to park on the streets in their neighborhoods, if they can find a space. In a perfect world, the fine for double parking in your neighborhood — where your kids, your groceries and your grandma reside — would come at some kind of discount. That, of course, would be an enforcement nightmare.

The truth is that smart double parking enforcement, like a lot of city living, depends on civility and occasionally cutting people some slack. On any given moment in the crowded quarters of the city, there are scads of short-term double parkers — delivery trucks, private cars and even city vehicles whose drivers are out writing parking tickets. They usually get a pass. Scooting around them is part of the urban dance. But double-parkers who abandon their cars for lengthy periods, blocking in legally parked cars and snarling traffic, should get a ticket. A \$100 fine sounds about right. It is higher than the suburbs, but city living has its price.