

## **DOUBLE-PARKING — City Council moves to ease East and South Side parking woes**

By Alan Z. Forman, *Investigative Voice*, December 1, 2010

Parking-space-challenged residents unable to park their cars close enough to their homes to unload groceries or move elderly parents and young children from house to car — without being ticketed for double-parking — are about to receive much-needed relief today as a committee of the Baltimore City Council takes a major step toward solving the parking problems of the area's most parking-deprived residential neighborhoods.

Shortly after noon the council's Judicial and Legislative Investigations Committee is scheduled to vote on a bill designed to ease the double-parking woes of residents in the Fells Point and Fells Prospect areas, as well as Federal Hill and Canton, where residential parking has been a virtual nightmare for longer than anyone cares to remember.

Early Wednesday afternoon, the committee, chaired by 1st District Councilman James B. Kraft, will consider legislation introduced by Kraft along with Councilman William H. Cole 4th (D-11th), and which is co-sponsored by all but three of the 14 members, in addition to the co-sponsorship of Council President Bernard C. "Jack" Young.

The committee heard testimony yesterday from city and police officials plus a community activist, and in a work session following the hearing determined to finalize the legislation for a committee vote early this afternoon.

The proposed legislation will reduce all \$250 parking fines in the city — with the exception of "blocking the box" (obstructing the flow of traffic through an intersection) — to a maximum of \$100 and require that police and parking agents give violators a 15-minute written warning before writing a citation.

### **'BLOCKING THE BOX'**

"Blocking the box" is a term that originated in New York and refers to blocking traffic in an intersection, thereby causing gridlock.

City Budget Director Andrew W. Kleine objected however, asserting that if the council reduces the maximum fine from \$250 to \$100 the city will suffer "a \$970,000 loss" in revenue, at a time when Baltimore can least afford it.

But in interviews with *Investigative Voice* following the Tuesday hearing, both Kraft and Cole pointed out that Kleine's estimate was off the mark, since a major portion of that revenue comes from citations for blocking the box and that it is the committee's intention not to reduce those fines in the proposed legislation.

In addition, Kraft said, the bill would provide restrictions against parking agents' use of "personal discretion" in deciding who and who not to ticket.

The agents will be required to provide motorists with 15-minutes' notice before issuing a citation, thereby preventing them from slapping a ticket on a double-parked vehicle while the driver is helping an elderly person from car to house, for example, or unloading groceries.

An official of the city's Transportation Department agreed with the committee. "Once the parking agents start interpreting the law, we're in for a lot of trouble," she said.

In an email to Kraft and Cole, one resident, who lives on South Washington Street in Upper Fells Point, complained that he was ticketed for double-parking in front of his house "to unload a Christmas tree a few years ago."

### **RUDE AND HARASSING**

He and other residents noted that parking agents were often rude and harassing; and another resident, Jeff Trueman, a lawyer, told the councilmen in an email:

"Ironically, and appallingly, the Dept.'s agents double-park and park in illegal spaces to write tickets. "The double standard is appalling and gross," he said.

According to Fells Point resident Alicia Ouderkirk, "I was issued a \$252 ticket for double parking in-front of my house to load my infant into the car. "I told the meter-maid I was only going to be a second, but she was rude and issued one anyways."

Victor Corbin, president of the Fells Prospect Community Association, told the committee: "The people in our district are fed up, tired of the poor quality of life; city residents are getting angry" and the city needs to "wise up," adding that "if you're worried about losing a million dollars" — a comment apparently directed at Budget Director Kleine — "you're going to lose a whole lot more: people are leaving the city."

Others in their emails made similar observations.

"It doesn't matter to me what the Finance [Department] report says," Kraft noted; "we need to fix this for the people of the City of Baltimore."

The lost revenue could be made up by increasing the fine for obstructing traffic, he said.

"I'd like to make the blocking the box fine \$500 like they have in New York City, especially in downtown areas.

"But this issue [of double-parking] we need to get resolved today," he asserted.

"In Baltimore County," observed Councilman Cole, "the same offense is 50 bucks."