

## Parking Payment Services

---

### Overview

The Town Center Parking Plan was adopted by the Mercer Island City Council in November 2023. Recommendation 1F of the Plan suggests considering paid parking in Town Center and deploying technology to create easier use and enforcement. Technology systems, like shared pay stations and app-based payment, provide flexibility in assigning the geography, time, and fees for paid parking. Moreover, using technology-based payment can aid enforcement of parking time limits. This briefing explores three options for parking payment systems – PaybyPhone, ParkMobile, and Flowbird – that would achieve the stated goals.

Many cities in the area manage their on-street parking supply by using mobile payment apps. Both Seattle and Kirkland use PaybyPhone for their mobile payment service. Diamond Parking, a prominent regional parking management company, uses ParkMobile. However, some of Mercer Island’s immediate neighbors, including the City of Bellevue, do not utilize a mobile parking payment service opting instead for free time-limited, on-street parking.

### PaybyPhone Mobile App

PaybyPhone (PBP) is a mobile parking app that is currently used by the cities of Kirkland, Bellingham, Olympia, and Seattle. PBP provides mobile payment service for the parking facility (60 parking spaces) at the Mercer Island Boat Ramp. All required signage is provided by PBP. Customers are charged a \$0.35 transaction fee to use the mobile parking app; this fee is embedded into the cost of parking. The City maintains a \$250 monthly minimum for transaction fees, meaning the City is responsible for covering the difference between the monthly minimum and the Transaction Fees. The current PBP contract expires after December 31, 2026.

Amending the current contract to include the 250 on-street parking spaces in Town Center would require updating the signage for these spaces. Under the current contract, PBP would cover the cost of the signage required to use their app. Moreover, if the City elects to waive the parking fee for the first two hours, or not charge a fee at all, the parking rate would be set to \$0. The transaction fee (\$0.35 per transaction) would be assumed by the City. In other words, the City would be billed \$0.35 for each parking event that occurred in Town Center; PBP would generate reports to bill the City accordingly. As such, the \$250 monthly minimum would continue to apply; however, the minimum would include the transaction fees for both the boat launch and Town Center areas.

Additional costs for PBP could include a one-time \$1,000 fee to integrate the parking software with the City’s enforcement software and a one-time \$500 fee to create new merchant account to begin accepting payment for parking.

Should the City initiate a new contract with PBP in 2027, current stipulations would be open for negotiation and contract details would need to be finalized with the vendor.

### Park Mobile App

ParkMobile is a parking management company that offers a mobile parking payment system. ParkMobile is used by various organizations in Washington, including the cities of Spokane, Marysville, Bremerton, and Port Townsend. ParkMobile has a large presence in King County through Diamond Parking, however there are no municipalities in King County that use this vendor. On Mercer Island, the Island Square garage uses the Park Mobile app for parking registration. ParkMobile provides a variety of payment options including:

- ParkMobile App: A mobile parking app for iOS and Android devices.

- Pay By Web: Web-based payment for people who do not want to download the app.
- Guest Checkout: Allows users to purchase parking without creating an account.
- Pay by Text: When the user parks in a ParkMobile zone, they can text the keyword “Park” to 77223 to receive a short link via SMS to start their session. ParkMobile does not charge for text notifications.
- Interactive Voice Recording (IVR): Drivers who don’t own a smartphone can pay for parking by calling a toll-free IVR number and making a payment over the phone.
- Flexible Payment Methods: In addition to all major credit and debit cards, the ParkMobile system can accept prepaid cards, Google Pay, Apple Pay, PayPal, and its own ParkMobile Wallet. This ensures that there are payment options for underbanked users.

Startup costs for using ParkMobile are minimal. ParkMobile is unique in that should the City pursue a ‘two-hours free with registration’ model, ParkMobile would charge a monthly subscription fee rather than transaction fees. The subscription fee would be around \$500 per month, or \$6,000 per year. Should the City implement paid parking, ParkMobile would charge a \$0.45 transaction fee that would be paid by the user.

Should the City enter into a contract with ParkMobile, the time to launch is typically 60 days. ParkMobile includes the following services at no cost:

- Signage and decal stickers for the initial rollout
- Setup and implementation
- Call center, customer support, hosting, and maintenance
- Social media, PR, standard marketing, and advertising for program launch
- Integrations with meter, enforcement, and LPR vendors

Finally, in the contract, ParkMobile can add a "termination for convenience." This clause would require 60 days’ notice to go into effective and would allow the City to end the contract at any time.

### **Flowbird Pay Stations**

Flowbird is a parking management company that offers a multi-function app platform and parking pay stations. Flowbird is used by various organizations in Washington, including the cities of Kirkland, Leavenworth, and Tacoma, as well as the Washington State Parks system. Flowbird charges a \$0.35 fee per transaction for any transactions that occur using the app, text option, and pay station. The City would absorb this fee should it implement a free two-hour parking with registration system. However, if the City implements paid parking, this fee could be paid by the user.

Flowbird offers multi-space pay stations for motorists to register their vehicle. The pay stations can be configured to pay by plate, pay by space, or pay and display. The pay stations can be configured to accept cash, coins, credit/debit cards, and non-contact payments like Apple Pay or Google Pay. The pay stations function using 4G LTE wireless communications and data is uploaded to the Flowbird software system and/or enforcement software integration.

The two options for registering at a kiosk are pay-and-display and pay-by-plate. The pay-and-display method requires the motorist to print a receipt of their registration and display on the dash of their vehicle. Parking Enforcement Officers would need to manually check each vehicle for a parking registration under this system. Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPRs) would not be functional under this method. The pay-by-plate method requires the motorist to input the license plate number into the kiosk. This method would require an additional integration with the City’s existing parking enforcement system and would function with ALPRs.

Moreover, the City would need to establish the maximum range a person would have to walk to register for parking to determine how many kiosks are needed in Town Center. However, it is likely that a kiosk would need to be visible from each parking space for the Parking Enforcement Officer to fairly enforce parking. Placement of the pay stations is largely determined by block length; however, it is recommended that each block have 1-2 pay stations. Pay stations need to be mounted on a level concrete surface. Flowbird can usually mount pay station onto sidewalks. The pay stations are equipped with solar panels and do not require an electrical attachment.

The cost for the pay stations ranges from \$7,000 for the base model to \$11,000 for models with additional features (cash/coin acceptance, ticket printer, etc.). There is a \$55 fee per month per pay station for online reporting and cell service. Maintenance requirements vary depending on the capabilities but could include cash/coin collection, debris removal, and printer and paper maintenance (pay and display only).

**Mobile Parking Payment Services Comparison**

Table 1 provides a comparison of the mobile parking payment services as described earlier.

<b>Table 1: Mobile Parking Payment Services Comparison</b>			
	<b>PaybyPhone</b>	<b>ParkMobile</b>	<b>Flowbird</b>
Transaction Fee/ Subscription Fee	\$0.35 per transaction \$250 monthly minimum	\$500 monthly subscription fee OR \$0.45 per transaction	\$0.35 per transaction
Integration Fee	One-time \$1,000	No cost	No cost
Signage Costs	Included under current contract. Would vary under new contract.	No cost	Decals provided. City would cover costs of posts and metal signage.
Kiosk Cost	-	-	\$7,000-\$11,000 per kiosk; \$55/month/kiosk
Regional Use	Bellingham, Olympia, Redmond, Seattle	Spokane, Bremerton, Port Townsend	Kirkland, Leavenworth, Tacoma
<b>Services Provided</b>			
Mobile App	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kiosks/Pay Stations	No	No	Yes
Pay by Web	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pay by Text	No	Yes	Yes
Interactive Voice Recording (Phone)	Yes	Yes	No