

On October 1, Bridger Park Downtown, the city-owned parking garage on East Mendenhall Street, will change to 2 hours of free parking, the Bozeman Parking Commission announced today.

“The addition of 435 additional 2-hour free parking spaces in Bridger Park is another example of collaborative efforts between the Downtown Partnership and the Parking Commission,” said Chris Naumann, executive director of the Downtown Partnership. “This will provide ample public parking for downtown customers.”

By throwing the garage spaces into the mix, it brings the total number of 2-hour free parking spaces downtown to over 1200.

“I think this sends a positive message to the community that downtown continues to evolve and improve as Bozeman’s premier commercial, social and cultural center,” Naumann said.

Currently in the downtown core, the city offers 2 hours free parking on the four surface lots and on Main Street and the side streets between Babcock and Mendenhall streets.

“The parking garage has been incredibly successful in terms of usage and positive feedback from the community,” said Paul Burns, Bozeman’s parking manager. “But the one disconnect has been that only 30 minutes were free in the garage while 2 hours are free on the streets.”

Bridger Park has seen a robust increase in usage since it opened in April 2009. For instance, in August 2009 there were 6,302 entries. In August 2010, that number jumped by 21.4 percent to 7,652.

“Thanks to the plentiful parking available at our new downtown garage, I have been pleased to see my fellow Bozemanites return to our downtown for events, shopping and socializing without the concern of time wasted searching for parking,” said Babs Noelle, owner of Alara Jewelry in downtown Bozeman. “Now, by extending the 2-hours of free parking found on the streets to our covered parking structure, I am sure the benefit will be recognized by the downtown-shy as well as the downtown-savvy.”

The Parking Commission was looking for a way to assist the downtown community with its parking needs and to eliminate the confusion created by having different periods of free time in different public parking areas.

“We want people to experience downtown in a care-free manner,” Burns said. “This will enhance visitors’ shopping experience and encourage them to extend their stay.”