

Clemson extends hours for football parking in effort to boost business

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON—Clemson City Council voted 5-2 Monday night to extend parking hours for people renting football park-

ing who are registered with the city in order to, hopefully, provide an economic boost to businesses suffering from a decline in customers on Clemson football game days.

Under an existing

gameday parking ordinance, people were allowed to leave their cars in rented spaces until 9 a.m. the following day. But in September, city council unanimously approved a temporary COVID-19

protocol ordinance for its gameday parking program that included an amendment allowing parking for up to four and a half hours prior to each

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home game rather than the originally proposed three hours.

Clemson University parking guidelines allowed people to park on university property for only three hours prior to the game and leave no later than 90 minutes after. The city had kept the 90-minute rule for vehicles to leave after the game prior to the latest change.

While the temporary ordinance had required people to park no earlier than four and a half hours prior to a game, they are now allowed to park from 7 a.m. to midnight, or an hour and a half following a night game, whichever comes later. Overnight parking is not allowed under the emergency ordinance.

"The private lot can kind of still do what they want, but people who have yards, there's parking registration in the city so if you own a house and want to rent some spaces in your yard, you could and would have to register with the city," Mayor J.C. Cook said. "It was done to, hopefully, get people to come and have time to go to town to help our businesses out. They're really suffering."

Council added the item to the agenda because the No. 1 Tigers will host a top-10 matchup with Miami at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. That game will represent the halfway point of this year's six-game home schedule.

Cook said some business owners have said they are seeing less business on a home football Saturday this season than on a regular Saturday.

"That's just unheard of in our town," he said.

Councilman Robert Halfacre suggested the change. During visits with business owners before the Tigers' game against Virginia last Saturday, Halfacre said he was told that businesses were seeing less traffic and less business than anticipated during a normal home football Saturday.

"One business owner interpreted that fans are coming in for a three-hour period, they're parking, they're going to the game and leaving an hour later," Halfacre said. "So they don't get a chance to patronize not only your downtown businesses, but your businesses throughout Clemson. He made a suggestion I thought I would share with council that we at least be tolerant on private parking.

"My suggestion is that we release that time limit of four and a half hours before the game. That may be one way to help, to release those times where people can come downtown and patronize in a

safe way, but all throughout Clemson."

Cook said he didn't have a problem extending the hours, adding that by doing so people have all day to shop downtown businesses or dine at restaurants.

Councilman Fran McGuire opposed the change. "I can accept the coming earlier part of this, but I don't support or really see the point of staying later, particularly at night," McGuire said. "I think that's excessive and doesn't help us at all."

McGuire added that the city should adhere to the city's gameday parking requirements, adding, "We need to exercise an

abundance of caution (due to COVID-19)."

Cook said the city has not experienced a problem with parking under the ordinance passed prior to the current football season, but added that the city should help business owners "any way we can."

"We have a little different stake than the university in this respect — they're discouraging tailgating 100 percent, while we're encouraging people to come and visit our businesses," Cook said. "The problem with 90 minutes, regardless if it's a noon game and it's over at 3 p.m., is we're running off people before supper."

The item was unan-

imously added to the agenda, as city attorney Mary McCormac said it involved tweaking the emergency ordinance. Only one reading was required because it is an emergency ordinance, and a super majority was required for approval.

McGuire's motion to keep the hour-and-a-half stipulation in place after the game failed 5-2, with Alesia Smith the only other council member to vote in support. Mayor pro tem John Ducworth's motion to reflect a 7 a.m. to midnight parking time that closes at midnight or 90 minutes following the game, whichever is later, was approved 5-2,

with McGuire and Smith opposed. Ducworth said if the change appears not to work, it can be amended at the next city council meeting Oct. 19, which is five days prior to the next home football game. The Tigers are set to host Syracuse on Oct. 24, but officials say they won't know the game time until television networks set their schedule.

City officials said a notice will be sent to all property owners who rent parking spots for the games regarding the change.

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