

21 July 2026

To the Elected Municipal Leaders of Camden, Maine:

Community ambassadors, business owners, property owners, lease- and stakeholders in the year-round vitality of downtown Camden, we write to share our informed experiences with the unintended consequences of the pay-to-park system. Further, we respectfully request the system be shelved in favor of a more isolated, quantifiable, easy-to-use and easy-to-enforce initiative within municipal lots, not vehicular streets.

The pay-to-park system makes the main streets and Route 1 new revenue-generating instruments for the municipality and seems to do so without regard for those who use the services provided along public ways. The parking systems require 30-minutes of use, yet most services are grab-and-go within the heart of downtown. This is particularly true not only of our Camden customers, but of the friends and neighbors in surrounding communities who have made Camden a regular destination.

Each business owner listed below has lost regular customers from surrounding communities, has assisted Mainers and visitors befuddled by the parking meters, and has served as interpreters when people try to find kiosks and instead realize the meter is the instrument for their use. Color coding further baffles residents and visitors — daily! Each storeowner has experienced people panicking about the threat of tickets when machines fail to accept payment methods. The result is often people driving away in frustration. Others resist taking the time it takes to fill out the parking information when they are simply trying to purchase a lunch sandwich or quick gift. Still, worse, Camden residents and business owners with receipts for paid grace time are ticketed by officers who can't find their plate numbers in the new system. The digital Park Smarter app fails to show available spaces for those people who attempt to follow signage and use the app. The officers are left patrolling the innocent instead of attending other duties they do well. In our collective experiences of assisting officers in keeping Camden safe, we find ourselves asking if the seasonal chalk patrol was more effective.

As patrons of downtown shops and services, we note the availability of parking in the late afternoons. This suggests capacity of the pay-to-use system exceeds utilization and shows a dramatic shift from the congested parking that led to this system in the first place. It suggests the folly of making the entire downtown a new revenue stream.

Camden's strength is its year-round community, the fact its downtown remains a place used by the many not the few, and the fact the mountains and sea restrict largescale development. The people we see from near and far enjoy the convenience and variety of what is still available in downtown Camden. They enjoy using a local grocer, going to a local bank, and grabbing a quick sandwich at a local deli. These activities are curbed now.

The desire to find new revenue sources is real. Let it be in town lots, with ease of access and a single parking arm. Leave Main/Elm/High and Bayview, Chestnut, and Mechanic as the come-and-go, two-hour access we all know. Build town coffers in zones for people who truly need two hours of parking or reduce meters to 15-minute increments and quick coins. As it stands, the system seems to alienate far more than it embraces, and we see the unintended consequences, those beyond quick revenue for the municipality, daily.

Respectfully,

Lorie Costigan, Glendarragh Farm Lavender

Arthur Kirklian, The Leather Bench

Tom Rothwell, Camden Deli

Jessica and Nancy Leonard, Leonard's

Marianne & Stuart Smith, Maine Sport, Bayview Collection, Lord Camden Inn

Katherine Heard, LCPC

Leslie Curtis & Don Peccerill, Leslie Curtis Designs

Rene Matthews, DAAC Designs

Lee Montgomery and Holly Rutland, Camden Harbor Properties, LLC

Margaret Rizzio, Serendipity Fine Consignment

Jana Halwick, Carver Hill Designs

Zac Adolpshen, Mechanic Street Barbershop

Jessica Lee Ives, Ives Art

Jonathan Ives, Making Movement Clinical Massage

Eve Smith, Mixed Greens

Allie Aiken, Nail Diva

Megan van der Kieft, Margo Moore Interiors and A Little Moore

Gary Anderson, Lily, Lupine & Fern

Isabel Crane, Zoot Coffee

Rachael Imus, Lone Pine Real Estate

Gregg Imus, Lone Pine

Alicia Adolphsen, Smoothie Shack & Mixed Greens

Thomas O'Donovan, Harbor Square Gallery

Scott Harty, Camden Real Estate

Prangahthita Palakawong, Long Grain

Hanna Adams & Devin Dearden, Winona's