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Grass-Roots Movement Opposes Paid Parking

By Alexander Bratersky

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City Hall plans to introduce paid parking this week, angering residents. **Igor Tabakov**

Angry downtown residents have started a campaign against the Moscow city government's plans to introduce paid parking at the end of this week.

Starting Nov. 1, several parking lots in the city center will start to charge drivers, head of the Moscow city transportation authority Maxim Liksutov said, Interfax reported last week.

More than 4 million vehicles ply the city streets on a daily basis, and there are 1 million parking spaces. City officials have started the paid parking project as one of a set of measures to help bring order and reduce congestion.

Liksutov added that commercial parking lots in downtown would have room for 550 cars as part of the initial experiment.

More parking lots will be set up by the end of February 2013, and the money collected

from drivers will be used for road maintenance and other public works. Liksutov said free parking would be allowed from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.

The city plans to build 2 million parking spaces by 2025, Liksutov said. But the new measures have angered downtown residents who say they cannot afford the parking. The city plans to charge 600 rubles ($18.75) for 12 hours of parking.

"Our citizens have been taken hostage by the parking project organizers," said Leonid Antonov, a resident of the city center and one of the organizers of a campaign against the new parking rules.

Campaigners have collected more than 800 signatures on a petition, which was sent to the mayor's office last week.

The group, calling itself Residents Against Private Parking in Downtown, has mobilized public opinion via Facebook and now has 336 members.

Antonov, an artistic director, said he and many car owners who don't use their vehicles regularly will not get any privileges as residents and will have to pay the same as drivers coming from outside the city.

Though free parking will be allowed inside building courtyards, they are designed to host only a small number of cars, and residents will still have to park on the streets, he added.

City center residents say they are willing to pay, but at a discounted rate, and they want to see a system of residential permits introduced, as is common in Europe.

Antonov said that in London a residential parking permit costs the vehicle owner $500 per year, as compared with $600 per month in Moscow.

"That rate doesn't correspond with any reality," said Antonov, who parks his car on the street near his apartment on Sredny Karetny Pereulok.

Downtown Moscow has some of the most expensive real estate in the world. Many central inhabitants inherited apartments from their parents or received them for free from the government under various preferential programs.

Antonov said several residents who signed the petition are artists from the Bolshoi Theater who live in the central district.

The activists, who hope to persuade Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin to change the parking rules, have already found support from Moscow City Duma Deputy Inna Svyatenko, of United Russia.

Svyatenko has asked Liksutov to clarify the situation. Antonov said his group expects to meet Liksutov soon.

The city prosecutor's office said earlier that the municipal government can't introduce its own rules about roads, which fall under federal jurisdiction.

But in a later statement, the prosecutor's office said the Moscow city government had "complied" with prosecutors' demands, but the statement did not elaborate, RIA-Novosti reported last week, citing a spokesman.

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