

BUSINESS

Free parking in downtown Fort Worth garages will be in your rearview mirror next year

by Bob Francis

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Free parking at garages such as this 777 Main garage downtown at 601 Commerce St. will be a memory after Dec. 31, 2025. (Fort Worth Report | Bob Francis)

If you celebrate into the wee hours of the new year, you might want to check where you parked or 2026 could begin with an expensive surprise.

The last free night and weekend garage parking in downtown Fort Worth disappears as the ball drops on Dec. 31, at least if you don't have a proper receipt.

The downtown Fort Worth tax district that provided free night and weekend parking at two downtown garages is ending the program.

Some credited free parking at the City Center Garage, 400 Jones St., and the 777 Main parking garage, 601 Commerce St., with revitalizing the area. Many now worry about how ending it will impact businesses.

Andy Taft, president of Downtown Fort Worth Inc., the partnership that administers the tax district, said the group plans to work with businesses to develop a validation program that helps patrons — particularly those visiting restaurants, venues for the arts and retailers — with parking.

The 2,562 on-street parking spaces will remain free on weekends and after 6 p.m. on weekdays, Taft said.

Reata Restaurant president Mike Micallef worries that the end of the parking program could have a negative impact on downtown. Micallef notes, however, that his business and others at The Tower offer validation in that building's garage, so it won't be a big issue for them.

“But I hate to see it for downtown because, for shoppers or visitors, there are other developments that have well-designed parking plans that are free and just easier to navigate,” he said. “They can easily go somewhere else besides downtown.”

The downtown tax district has provided some form of free evening and weekend parking since 1999. Before that, Sundance Square offered a similar program to attract visitors to the then-fledgling 35-block area of downtown.

Those efforts helped downtown become a destination for locals and visitors alike.

“I feel like it was a big part of making this area what it is,” he said. “I hate to see anything that makes it more difficult for people to find us.”

If you go ...

To find a parking spot downtown or at other areas of town, check out the aptly named **Fort Worth Parking site.**

Patrons of restaurants and retailers in Sundance Square can receive free 2.5-hour parking with validation at their garages at 345 W. 3rd St. and 201 W. 6th St.

Owners of the garages leaving the program did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday.

When Sundance Square left the **free weekend and night parking program** in June 2024, officials there cited increased demand for parking in their garages by Sundance tenants, employees and guests. Sundance Square went to a validation system for patrons of businesses there.

Officials with Fort Worth's economic development department, which administers the tax districts, said they had no comment at this time.

According to the city of Fort Worth, the downtown taxing district paid \$143,000 for space in the City Center garage and \$327,500 for the 777 Main garage in fiscal year 2024. Other funds related to the program were \$5,000 for marketing and \$40,000 for parking garage insurance.

The tax district funds come from incremental tax dollars paid over a base year's collections. The district then uses those funds to provide improvements and amenities, such as the free parking, tourism and convention business support, and assistance with public infrastructure projects in the downtown area.

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