

Fort Mill District must lower student parking fees

by Rian Donahue

Driving. It's a rite of passage, a vital component of the so-called 'teenage experience.' But it's an experience that is becoming exceedingly expensive.

Many students experience the difficulties of saving for a vehicle, taking hours of driving lessons that cost up to \$900, and paying their own insurance. These financial responsibilities are demanding when working a part-time job and incorporating a school workload. Once they've managed those burdens, students face a new expense: student parking.

The \$50 fee for Fort Mill students is far too much for students who transport themselves to a place they are required to attend every day by federal law.

The district mandates students who drive themselves to school to take a driver's education course, such as South Carolina's Alive at 25, then pay a \$50 fee for a parking pass. While \$50 isn't terribly expensive, it can be rather steep for high school students working part-time or for those who are not working. Fort Mill Schools' parking fees are the most expensive of any of the surrounding districts.

Fort Mill School District parking fees are the same for all three high schools, Assistant Principal Michael Abraham explained. "The average cost for surrounding districts is \$30," he said. "I would

STUDENT PARKING	RIVER BLUFF GATORS \$5
Nation Fords Fees vs. Surrounding High Schools	NORTHWESTERN \$20
by Rian Donahue	BLYTHEWOOD B \$25
NATION FORD NF \$50	CLOVER C \$45

be willing to present a price change. I don't know if all of the schools have to agree to it—we try to stay aligned with each other."

According to Fort Mill High School bookkeeper Denae Price, the parking fees were set by the school's former principal, Dee Christopher. With Nation Ford's opening in 2007 and Catawba Ridge's opening in 2019, the other schools likely followed suit.

Relative to your average high school student's in-

come, parking passes can be a lot of money to shell out of their own pockets each year.

Nation Ford Principal Chris Chandler stated that in addition to the maintenance of the parking lot much of the funds made from parking fees are used for miscellaneous purposes, such as event funding, teacher appreciation, and for other purposes that the school's federal funding won't cover. It's one of the few accounts not tied to federal or state funding, and that money can only be used for instructional purposes.

Nation Ford sold around 600 parking passes this year-making upwards of \$30,000. With the high revenue the school makes off of the parking passes, and with what's rolling over year after year, the school makes more than enough to cover the cost of their miscellaneous expenses.

While riding the bus is free, this isn't a practical option for many older students.

The implementation of the fees used for various general purposes puts the burden for funding only on those students who drive, and those students already alleviate transportation costs for the district.

A more equitable way to cover maintenance costs for the parking lot and still have miscellaneous funds to support our school community would be a school-wide fee and allow drivers to pay only for the costs they incur. It's time to lower cost of student parking.