

KINDNESS METERS LONDON



A brief introduction

Kindness meters are nothing new and already exist in a number of cities throughout North America. This is not my idea originally and I make no such claim. Kindness meters are nothing more than retrofitted and repurposed parking meters, brightly colored with clear signage to make their purpose clear – as they are not in fact for parking. Instead 100% of money collected from the meters is donated to local community groups dedicated to providing services and resources to individuals experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. My recent experience with them was on a recent family trip to Ottawa for Canada Day, where we noticed one in the Byward Market district and my wife loved the idea and wondered why we did not have them in London. It was a question that I could not answer and then started to wonder myself ... and well, here we are today. The response thus far from those I have been in contact with has been enthusiastic, incredibly positive and quite frankly, a little overwhelming. I believe it is no longer a question of if kindness meters are coming to London– only when and how. The initiative has been purposely set up so that once installed there will be no ongoing costs associated with the project – only spare change making real change.

Positioning

While some cities have introduced kindness meters as an alternative to giving to panhandlers, this seems unnecessarily cruel. The intention is not to replace money given to panhandlers or even to existing charities – but to supplement them and help both by providing an alternate method of giving for people as they make their way through the city. We suspect there will be people who continue to give to panhandlers, others who try the meters and some who will do both and/or neither. However, simply by the presence of kindness meters we are hopeful we can not only raise much needed funds for a number of local charities doing important work – but also raise awareness around the issues around poverty and homelessness.

Sourcing the meters

As you may be aware, the city of London has been installing and converting existing meters to high-tech ‘pay-and-display’ meters. What this has meant is a LARGE stock of the older meters. While some do need to be kept for spare parts for the remaining older style meters, I have been assured by parking services (and seen myself) that they have a number they are both willing and able to part with, pending council’s approval. While the original plan involved buying the meters on-line, the recycling and locally sourcing of them would be the ideal scenario. At the end of the day the city has meters they don’t need and I need meters I don’t have. The initial ask is for five meters with the hope that more could be acquired if the initial test period proves successful and there is further demand for additional ones from the community.

Retrofitting and repurposing

A major concern is that people may confuse these for regular parking meters in error so great efforts will be taken to ensure this does not happen. First of all these will be placed in locations that would normally have a parking meter, but more on that later.


Additionally, their appearance will be quite different. The meters will be painted a bright colour (the current idea is a bright blue – like the one used for Downtown London) and all existing stickers will be replaced with ones that make no reference to parking, but instead to kindness, local charities and thanks. As well, each parking meter will be affixed with the following sign (*this is an early rough draft*):

THIS IS A KINDNESS METER


This is **NOT** a parking meter.

*The money collected in this meter will be
donated to local community groups
dedicated to providing services and
resources to individuals experiencing
poverty and/or homelessness.*

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space for additional
logos if required

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While I am confident that I will be able to arrange funding sources for the painting and customization if required, I am hopeful a local business may be willing to complete the work in return for sponsorship. Either way, it is my intention to cross that bridge when I come to it. (See also: installation of meters.)

Collecting the money

Who will collect the money? As it turns out, by discussing the matter with parking enforcement the ideal scenario would be that they would collect the money using existing staff. This has been recommended in part because all of the existing meters work on a ‘master key’ and for reasons I cannot figure out they seem reluctant to give me a copy. Weird. As well, as long as the meters are installed in a mutually agreed upon location, it should have a minimum impact on workload. Lastly, because meters come equipped with a chip or barcode – they can easily determine how much money came out of each of the kindness meters and track it accordingly.

The proposed locations

The only limitation at the current time is that meters be placed in areas where there are existing collection required – existing parking meters are mainly in the downtown core where is exactly where we would like the kindness meters located. While suggestions are welcome here are the current ideas where the initial five kindness meters would be placed:

King & Talbot Richmond & Central
Dundas & Adelaide Wellington & Dufferin
Western Fair Farmers Market

Giving the money away

100% of the money collected will go directly to local community groups dedicated to providing services and resources to individuals experiencing poverty and/or homelessness. I will actively solicit the advice of people who work in this field as well as those who use them. As well, the general public will be invited to nominate charities who, once vetted, will be added to the list of charities. Finally, once every three months there will be a public vote and the top two will be the charities for that period. It is the hope that using this system will be fair as well as choose organizations of various sizes and work with different aspects of this important issue. Again, parking enforcement has agreed to send the money directly, absolving me from temptation.

Donate, collect, disperse ... and repeat.

Spare change making real change.

Thanks for your time – please feel free to contact me anytime with any questions or for additional information!

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