

# City wants input on downtown parking

## Officials meet with business leaders to discuss parking issue

BY LANA BRADSTREAM  
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The city of Rapid City has finally developed a proposal to help fix downtown parking. However getting downtown business owners to agree on the proposal may take some time. That is why Alderman Bill Okrepkie wants to hold some meetings so the city can garner some information on whether or not the proposal will work and if it does, how to tweak it.

Okrepkie and Growth Management Community Planning Coordinator Monica Heller met with members of the Rapid City Downtown Association to present the proposal on Friday, April 25. The proposal calls for new electronic meters to be installed in downtown.

Two-hour parking will remain on Main and St. Joseph streets; the rest of downtown would have varied times for parking.

One block away, four-hour meters would be installed; parking would cost 25 cents per hour. Two blocks away, 10-hour meters would cost 25 cents every two hours.

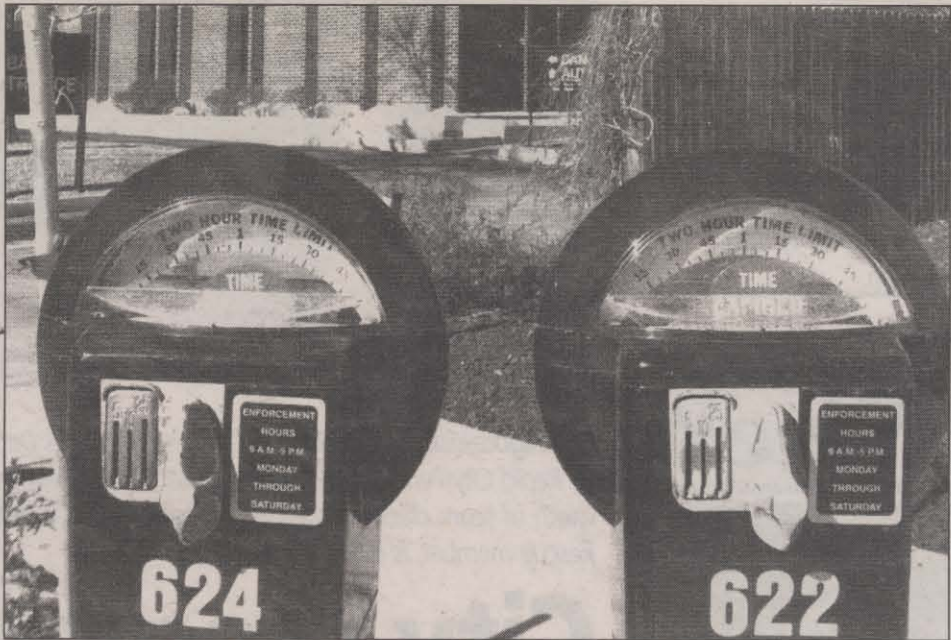
All the meters would have a button installed that would provide 15 minutes of free parking and people will have the option of buying pre-paid cards to use on the meters. This proposal would require the city to purchase 1,700 of the meters at an estimated cost of \$600,000. Heller told the Association the projected revenue of fines would pay that off in a year.

Tickets would be issued on a graduated scale. The first ticket issued to anyone would be a warning with no fine. Mayor Alan Hanks said there has been discussion to give the violator a coupon of some sort.

"We want to send the message out there that we want people's business downtown," Hanks said. "If they get a courtesy ticket, they can also get a 10% off coupon or a free coffee or bagel."

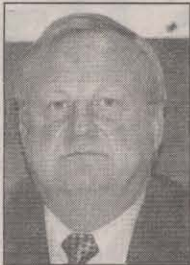
According to Hanks, this way tourists would not get as frustrated when they see a ticket and would be more likely to return to downtown Rapid City.

If someone should get additional tickets within a certain time frame however, the fines will be increased. The second ticket would cost \$5. The third, \$10 and the fourth, \$20. Hanks stressed that the goal of the city is not to fine people but to create additional parking downtown.



FILE PHOTO

Parking meters like these will be replaced — at a cost of \$600,000 — under a proposed parking plan. Go to [www.rcweeklynews.com](http://www.rcweeklynews.com) to see a map of the plan.



Bill Okrepkie

The revenue generated from fines would be used for a downtown parking fund that would help build additional ramps or parking lots.

Downtown Association Vice President Chris Johnson asked if the city would have to hire more people to enforce the new plan. Heller said with the meters installed, the city is still anticipating it would continue to employ 16 people.

Downtown Association President Steve Rolinger told Okrepkie and Heller that tourism marketing expert Roger Brooks' stressed that two-hour parking in the downtown core is just not enough time. However Johnson said if the core is extended to four hours, it defeats the purpose of encouraging downtown employees to park farther away — a key element to fixing the parking.

According to Downtown Association director Bob Fuchs, four-hour parking in the core is not acceptable and even going to three hours causes a little concern — but it is possible.

"That is why we are here," Okrepkie told them. "What do you want? Does this proposal make sense? Do we need to change it? Come back and say what you need. This whole deal is about how to best support the downtown businesses. It is important to have a live and vibrant downtown. It is important you guys do

good."

Okrepkie added that it is very important to get as much information from business owners as possible. That way, a plan can be enforced that would work for all.

Fuchs said he thought the plan the city formed was very well thought out and that he couldn't think of much to

# parking plan

change about it. However getting the business owners to agree could be challenging.

"There is such a diversity of downtown businesses," Fuchs said. "It will be difficult coming up with a plan that works for everybody but this is a good first step. It is a very encompassing plan."

Hanks added this proposal is completely independent of the third level of the parking ramp. "The ramp is going up regardless," he said.

Once the city has information from business owners, Okrepkie said he is hoping a plan can be approved by this fall.

According to Hanks, the proposal will need to be approved by the Rapid City Legal and Finance Committee as well as the Rapid City Council. He said at least four public hearings will also be held — probably more. This way the public will have six different opportunities to give their input to the city.

"We do not want to jump in too quickly," Hanks said. "We want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to understand the plan. If it needs to be changed, it will be."

It will be a couple of months before it is presented to the City Council. "It is to our advantage to do something like this," Okrepkie said. "We need support on this. Help me here on this one."