

Citizens gathered at a special Rapid City Council meeting on Monday, Sept. 29, to discuss the proposed downtown parking plan.

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PHOTO BY LANA BRADSTREAM



Parking concerns to be heard

BY LANA BRADSTREAM
The Weekly News

Rapid City citizens will have four more opportunities to tell city officials how they feel about the proposed downtown parking plan.

The Rapid City Council did not make any decisions regarding the plan during a special Monday, Sept. 29, council meeting. Instead they elected to send the plan back to the Legal and Finance Committee meeting on Oct. 15. According to Alderman Malcom Chapman, any changes that should be made to the plan should go through the necessary process first, which includes two Legal and Finance meetings and two City Council meetings.

The proposed plan was unveiled in April and due to the number of comments received Monica Heller, Growth Management planning coordinator, made changes to the original proposal. The changes include:

- Remove parking meters on Columbus and Quincy streets between Ninth Street and West Boulevard because that area is in the historic district.

- Change the meters in front of the YMCA from two hours to

four hours.

- Change the meters on Mount Rushmore Road south of Quincy Street from 10 hours to two hours.

- Change the meters on St. Joseph Street between Fifth and Sixth streets from two to four hours.

- Change the meters on Main Street between Fourth and Second streets from 10 hours to four hours.

- Add two-hour meters near the City/School Administration Center on Sixth Street.

Thirty-one citizens spoke at the special meeting regarding the plan – a number of them from the West Boulevard Association, who feel that the plan will push parkers into their neighborhood in an effort to avoid paying.

John Wagner told the council the West Boulevard Association is trying to protect the historic district. He said parking meters are a clear symbol of commercial activity and is an encroachment on the district. Wagner asked the council to consider three things:

- Remove the parking meters on Quincy and Columbus and the east side of Ninth Street.

- Consider performing a cost

benefit analysis.

- Delay a decision until the West Boulevard Association has two representatives on the council. The association is in Ward 5, which currently only has one council member – Chapman. The other Ward 5 position has been vacant since Bob Hurlbut resigned from the council at the beginning of September.

Mike Lemay said other than the meters being placed in the historic district, the council must also consider the residential neighborhood.

"It is beyond my belief that anyone came up with that," he said.

Others who don't live on West Boulevard also spoke about the plan, such as Kelly Tumas, owner of a dance wear shop on Sixth Street that sells things to "itty-bitty people."

According to Tumas, people in offices above her shop play the two-hour parking game where someone will run out every two hours and move their vehicle.

"Not to sound mean but I would like the people above me to be as inconvenienced as me," Tumas said.

Roger Frye is another Sixth

Street business owner who owns a paint store. "Four-hour meters would hurt my business quite a bit," he told the council.

His daughter Julie Frye told the council they don't want their customers to walk a long way. "No meters would be great," she said. "Keep it the way it is."

Dan Senftner has worked downtown for 32 years and he told the council area communities such as Sioux Falls and Aberdeen have upper level parking. "There's a lot of revenue generated in the core," Senftner said. "What we need is unity because everyone enjoys what we have here and wants to see growth. We need convenience for people to park. There are areas downtown to park but we need extra parking."

John Brewer with Destination Rapid City agreed with Senftner, saying he would also prefer additional parking. "This is not about me. This is about Rapid City, our future and our hopes," he said.

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Alderman Ron Weifenbach told the council it's important to identify a funding source for additional downtown parking spaces. He said the city should

move forward with parking on St. Joe where the proposed Rushmont project is to be built – with or without the project. He also suggested the city should partner with the YMCA to provide additional parking.

"If employers are allowing their employees to do the shuffle, shame on you," Weifenbach said. "We need to look into bonding for ramps as soon as possible."

Weifenbach added he will not support the parking plan in any way, shape or form without a long-term solution.

A number of speakers told the council they did not think it was fair to make people pay for downtown parking when they are not parking downtown. All the revenue generated from the parking meters will be placed in the city Parking Lot and Enterprise Fund.

Alderman Karen Gundersen Olson told the crowd that additional parking is synonymous with parking structures. "There is no free lunch," she said. "Someone has to pay for it. The plan needs to create revenue by changing meters and going to an accumulating fund for structures the community finds important."

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