

Parking proposal does have some merit

THE ISSUE: A downtown parking proposal will be reviewed by the city council next week.

OUR VIEW: We don't think meters will be the final solution for downtown, but today, it might be the best option.

Rapid City's downtown parking plan is generating plenty of discussion and a good portion of it is skeptical of the current proposal. Understandably so. Many business owners are frustrated by lack of parking at their downtown establishments. And those with businesses outside the downtown area are watching their parking slowly filling as more drivers are moved out of the central part of the city.

The proposed city parking plan calls for a mix of two-, four- and 10-hour meters in a variety of locations in and around downtown Rapid City surrounding the two-hour free parking in the downtown area itself.

We're in favor of a parking plan that gives customers the opportunity to frequent the downtown businesses and moves employee parking out of the main retail areas. These prime parking spots downtown should be for customers, not employees, if the downtown area is to thrive.

But meters are only a Band-aid approach to the city's parking issues. The city council needs to work out a permanent solution, which may not involve meters at all.

There are projects under consideration that have merit and may help address the parking issues.

The Rushmont project is being discussed again. After a year of little

action, agreements are being prepared for the project. While it could change, at this time the proposal calls for a 17-story building with retail and office space and condominiums.

The project might help ease the downtown parking crunch by adding about 150 new parking spots to the downtown area. Considering there's not an employer in the downtown area that has multiple employees needing parking space, those spots could go a long way for Rapid City.

The Rushmont isn't the answer to the city parking woes, but it could be part of the solution.

Additional parking ramps have also been suggested. This would be the most obvious way to address the issue, but not the least expensive. However, the proposed metered parking plan would generate revenue, some of which could be used for ramps.

Another idea that has been discussed is a pedestrian walkway over

Omaha. This could alleviate some of the parking issues and connect the civic center area with the downtown area.

The city faces hurdles, regardless of the number of parking spaces. Many employees are content to park on Main Street and simply move their vehicles every two hours. Even with the current plan that situation wouldn't change.

Until the employees buy in to the idea of leaving that parking for paying customers, even more parking spaces a short walk away will have little effect.

Obviously the long-term solution to the downtown parking woes would be more parking spots. Until then, the city should try this parking plan, or some version of it. If it doesn't work, take the good parts of it, leave out the bad, and move on to another plan.

Doing nothing will only result in getting nothing done.