

City moves ahead on adding downtown parking

■ New Main Street ramp would have 322 spaces.

10/2/97

By Heidi Bell
Journal Staff Writer

Keep circling the block until next October and you should find 172 new parking spaces opening up.

The Rapid City Council's Legal and Finance Committee on Wednesday agreed to select a firm to design the downtown parking ramp planned north of Main Street between Fifth and Sixth streets. Construction is set to begin next spring and be done by fall.

The new, 322-space ramp will be built on a parking lot that now holds 150 cars. The estimated \$2.5 million project will be funded through leased parking fees, parking fines and meter revenues.

All but one of the city's leased parking lots currently have waiting lists for spaces. As a result, many

employees park on the street in spaces meant for customers. Many say the ramp would help free up additional customer parking.

Community Development Director Bonnie Hughes said downtown developers and business owners have already committed to renting 75 ramp spaces. She expects commitments soon for the additional 40 spaces the city wants to pre-sell.

"We need from you a commitment that you care about the investment that's being made in downtown Rapid City," said Stan Adelstein, who has renovated several downtown buildings, in encouraging the committee to move forward with planning.

The request goes to the full council Monday night for formal approval.

Also on Wednesday, the three committee members remaining at the end of the four-hour meeting approved a request for 15-mph speed-limit signs and flashing lights at Fifth Street and Fairmont Boulevard near St. Elizabeth Seton School.

Catholic Schools Superintendent Dick Thompson asked that the signs

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— Stan Adelstein,
urging downtown parking ramp

and lights be added to make the area safer for students. Last Friday, a second-grader was hit by a car while crossing the street near school.

"The only thing that saved him, in essence, was his backpack," Thompson said, noting that the child went through the car's windshield.

A fifth-grade student was struck by a car on Fairmont Boulevard Wednesday morning, he added.

Thompson also said traffic in the area includes many people going to

or from Rapid City Regional Hospital. Many are ill or under stress, he said, and may not pay attention to the fact that they are near a school.

City Traffic Engineer Greg Luttrell said anyone who takes a driver's exam should know speed limits are 15 miles per hour around schools. The speed limit is not posted around all schools, he said. "There just aren't that many signs in the world."

He said St. Elizabeth Seton students should cross at the traffic signal at Fifth and Fairmont.

In the end, aldermen Al Cornella, Todd Ossenfort and Dennis Catron voted to put flashing lights and speed-limit signs on Fifth and Fairmont near the school.

Committee Chairman Tom Johnson did not vote, but said he thought the school should provide someone to help children cross the street.

The committee also heard from teen-agers and adults asking for a skateboard/in-line skate park.

"Many public places don't want us to skateboard there," Josh Hockenson said.

"This is (my son's) sport, and he needs somewhere to practice it," Julie Hügeley said. Sidewalks don't work. "It's like telling a basketball player to go play his sport on a football field."

Alderman Steve Rolinger encouraged the group to get organized and draft a plan to present to the council. "You need a place to skate," he said.

But Alderman Karen Bulman pointed out that the city did have a skateboard park that wasn't used.

Johnson said the city may be able to put ramps and pipes for skateboarders somewhere, but not call it a skateboard park to avoid legal snags.

The committee also:

■ Agreed to ask for proposals from groups wanting to use the Halley Park Museum building.

■ Denied an appeal by Aaron and Deborah Johnson on several city ordinance violations. The couple has about eight cars in their back yard, which has been fenced to an arguably illegal height, and a dump truck.

City staff also said Aaron Johnson needs a variance to operate a home business because he sometimes fixes cars and then sells them.