

# Claims increase that city is stalling on building parking ramp

—By Nick Vazquez—

Bruce Meister feels he has a connection to the downtown area and the ongoing dilemma concerning parking.

Meister, who has operated BJ's Grinder King for almost 11 years, said the possibility of a ramp in the downtown area is a viable one that has been discussed before.

Meister explained that many businesses, including the old Rapid Theater, a gas station, the Yellow Cab Company and others, were forced to close their doors when the city decided to make a flat parking lot area in the 500 block of St. Joseph Street.

"When most of the buildings that were there were torn down, most of us were under the impression that the city was to put in a ramp. Time went on, and as little as four years ago I was told that the rumor of a ramp was history. But the truth is that many of us in the downtown area knew there was supposed to be a ramp and not a flat lot, as there is now," said Meister.

Meister alleges that some of the businesses were not as profitable

after they were moved and that it took as many as four or five years for the owners to recover their losses. "The dry cleaner, for instance, went out of business because he was forced out of his building. Although he chose to retire, I think it was more of a decision of the situation being hopeless.

"I told LaCroix (former Rapid City mayor Art LaCroix) not to bite the hand that feeds you. These were good businesses, and people who owned their business and paid taxes," Meister said. "I told him it would destroy good taxpayers by taking their property and that it was going to cost the city money to put the lot in on top of it. A better idea would have been to put the lot on city property and that way the taxpayer would still end up paying for it."

Meister explained his own personal plan for a parking ramp—on top of St. Joseph Street—with an entrance ramp off Mount Rushmore Road and an exit ramp leading to Fifth Street.

"They could build it in one level with the option for another deck as

a possibility. This way they could put the ramp on city property with an enclosure for city shoppers," noted Meister. "People like to shop out of the weather, and businesses could also add a second layer to their establishments, and shopping would also be done up above."

Meister said the parking ramp should be appropriate for two areas of diagonal parking and two of parallel and that this would also allow for two lanes of traffic.

"In essence there would be enough space for two full city blocks of parking and not just one as it is now," Meister said. "But it was already in the works to destroy these businesses even though they were not yet torn down so the idea of a parking ramp was dismissed."

Meister said two years ago when he was on the parking committee during downtown construction that he had talked to economic development director Bonnie Hughes about the situation.

"I asked her about the feasibility of selling bonds to build the ramp, and the bonds would be paid for

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# Parking ramp could be no cost to taxpayers

## ■ PARKING

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with downtown parking fees. She said at that time there would be enough money available," he said.

"The city generates approximately \$250,000 in revenues from parking and other fees, and the majority of this money goes into the general fund and just sits there. Here

we could have a ramp at no cost to the taxpayers; yet nothing is ever done. But the idea may still be in the back of their minds and the same thing could be done on Main Street if they wanted," Meister noted.

"There should be a mandate available to tap the general fund when necessary," he added.

In the Jan. 5 issue of *The Rapid City Reporter*, Hughes was quoted

as saying, "The city can't keep eliminating buildings from the tax rolls to build surface parking lots and keep a viable downtown. If we're going to look at additional parking downtown, it's going to have to go up."

In the same issue of *The Reporter*, LaCroix said when he was in office there were drawings completed regarding building of a downtown ramp. "Why it didn't fly when I got out of there, I don't know," said LaCroix, mayor of Rapid City from 1975 to 1987.

Nick Didier of the Hotel Alex Johnson was also questioned earlier in January and confirmed Meister's assumption.

"I do feel there was a letdown on that (the idea that downtown business owners had the perception that the parking district assessment was for ramp parking), and I think that everybody assumed that it would be a parking ramp because that's what they talked about and had estimates on to begin with," Didier was quoted as saying.

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