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Downtown parking ramp still a possibility for city

Vertical parking may be long-term solution for additional parking, but it will be costly

—By Bob Emery—

Although surface lots won out over parking ramps in the 1980s, there still might be vertical parking in downtown Rapid City's future, according to the director of the Community Development office.

Bonnie Hughes says 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 doing additional parking downtown, it's going to have to go up," she said.

"But it's going to be costly," Hughes

said. "And in building the ramp, we're going to have to be able to project the 30- to 50-year needs for parking."

Normally, ramps should be used for long-term parking, Hughes said. "You're going to have to look at more than \$20 a month for leased parking costs, in order to be able to retire the debt," she said.

Building ramp stalls can cost anywhere from \$6,800 up to \$10,500 per stall, Hughes said. Surface stalls cost from about \$500 to \$3,500.

Hughes says funds from the downtown

parking district assessment were never specifically committed to ramp parking, although some downtown business owners feel differently. That fee was a one-time assessment applied to downtown business owners in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and paid over a 10-year period.

"In 1984, when the original half-cent sales tax was added to build the airport, City Hall and downtown parking, there was discussion about building a ramp," Hughes said. "There was never any commitment

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■ PARKING RAMP

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made that the city was going to build a ramp, but there was discussion centered around the cost of building a ramp versus surface parking."

According to Nick Didier of Hotel Alex Johnson, a number of downtown business owners had the idea that the downtown parking district assessment was definitely for ramp parking. "I do feel there was a let-down on that," he said. "Everybody assumed that it would be a parking ramp because that's what they talked about and had estimates on to begin with."

But since the surface lots are in existence now, Didier feels that the city should wait and coincide construction of a parking ramp with bringing a business to downtown Rapid City. "We'd love to have a parking ramp for the hotel, but in all fairness, I feel that it can be better utilized by having an additional business there," he said.

Didier hopes that the city will bring in a bank, insurance company or other business. "Maybe have ground-floor retail, maybe have two or three floors of parking, maybe then have offices above that. I think that would be more beneficial to downtown than just a parking ramp alone," he said.

Didier also said that a parking ramp for downtown could possibly be added to the Vision 2012 list of capital improvement projects,

funded by the recent half-cent sales tax extension.

According to Art LaCroix, Rapid City mayor from 1975 to 1987, "Somebody would have to study the feasibility now, but I still think parking ramps are something we eventually want ... to keep downtown viable. I always wanted ramps, we had drawings done ... why it didn't fly when I got out of there, I don't know."

LaCroix believes some of the downtown business owners talked to members of the Common Council and convinced them that surface parking would actually be more advantageous.

LaCroix said it is "a vicious damn rumor" that dollars from the parking district assessment were used to partially fund the City/School Administration Center. "That would be against ordinances. No mayor or Common Council member in their right mind would ever do anything like that," he said.

LaCroix said the city could have used the parking revenue to bond for parking ramps. "The concept for funding these things is still there, and it still could be done," he said. "Sioux Falls did it, they built ramps and filled them. They're going to build another one, last I heard."

Harley Lux, finance officer for the city of Lead, said that city solved its severe downtown parking problems with a parking ramp. But he said it was constructed in the 1970s with federal revenue-sharing money, which no longer exists.