

First develop parking plan

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■ The city council should develop a downtown parking plan before it builds a parking garage or raises parking fines.

Consultants studying whether a parking garage is needed in downtown Rapid City found that parking fines and leased parking rates here are well below average for cities of fewer than 100,000 people.

Aha, a revenue opportunity.

But before the council jumps on this opportunity, it should come up with a long-range plan for downtown parking.

Simply because rates here are lower than in other cities of similar size isn't justification for raising the rates. Perhaps those other cities are

trying, through their higher fines, to accomplish something Rapid City doesn't want to accomplish.

The Journal's view

There could be legitimate reasons for raising parking fines and lease rates. The way to find out is to develop an overall, long-range downtown parking plan.

If a parking garage is part of the plan, higher lease rates and fines could be justified as a means to generate revenue. But perhaps the strategy shouldn't be to build a garage with money collected from parkers, but from the businesses whose employees are parking in spots better left for shoppers. After all, in other areas of the city, businesses are responsible for providing parking for employees and patrons.

Higher fines might be justifiable as part of a strategy to discourage downtown employees from parking in spots that should be reserved for shoppers. But if this is the objective, it would make sense to target employees by increasing the fines after repeat violations, rather than penalizing shoppers who happen to spend more time in downtown stores than they intended when they parked.

Getting shoppers to come downtown and stay longer could be the objective of a downtown parking strategy. Raising the fines could have the unintended consequence of doing just the opposite. Shoppers who don't mind paying \$2 to park and shop for several hours might mind paying the proposed \$5. Besides, they can go to the Rushmore Mall and park for free all day.

Higher parking fines and lease rates might be good steps for Rapid City to take. Building a parking garage might be also be a good step. Maybe both aren't needed. Maybe both are. But both depend on how they would fit into an overall plan for downtown parking.

The council should have one before it goes further with these proposals.