

# Few attend hearing on downtown parking

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By BOB FELL  
Journal Staff Writer

If the Rapid City Common Council expected a large crowd for a public hearing on downtown parking fines and limited parking zones Wednesday evening, they were disappointed. Only a handful of citizens were on hand and they were downtown merchants.

Only Police Chief Rae Neal carried the ball for the absent motorists and downtown shoppers.

The hearing was informal and the council took no action after more than an hour of discussion and a variety of recommendations. Mayor Don Barnett said the results of the hearing will be reviewed by council committees next week.

Neal had recommended the \$5 fine for overtime parking in the downtown two-hour zone be eliminated as well as the two-hour zone. While Neal said he had no objection to the \$5 fine, he does feel the two-hour limit and the meters together do not work. Mixing the two systems creates a problem, he said.

Nate Horwitz, speaking for the downtown merchants, said the consensus of a meeting was the idea was right and that the limited parking with a heavy fine did open up spaces. He said, however, that perhaps the system is imperfect and the penalty might be a bit harsh.

It was the recommendation of his group that the fine be reduced to \$2 but the two-hour zone remain. This is one solution that will be considered by committees, but when the mayor asked for a show of hands in support only half the council indicated agreement.

The perfect solution, said Horwitz, would be for the city to use the money in the Parking Lot and Area Fund to provide more off-street parking downtown. He accused the city of using the money for other than off-street parking for which it is intended.

He also was critical of the city operating parking lots in competition with private operators, claiming the high taxes on land forced operators to charge more than the city. He said he and a partner had lost \$10,000 trying to operate parking lots.

Neal had said that one of the difficulties in explaining the limited parking to violators is

the lack of signs warning the motorist. Jim Hilton, city streets engineer, advised the council that decals that could be attached to each meter are already on hand. He also said that larger signs are available that could be posted in each block.

Along with the reduced fine, Horwitz also suggested that the limited zone areas be properly signed, and, as an added deterrent to "meter feeders," to have the meter maids compile a list of the persistent violators and turn the names over to their employers.

Pete Geyerman, a downtown clothier, suggested eliminating the 15-minute meters. "No one can do business in 15 minutes," he said.

Barnett said he knows dozens of other business men who would "scream their heads off" if the 15-minute meters were eliminated.

Geyerman said he did not think the limited parking is working. "If you want to see hopscotch, you should watch the lawyers' secretaries come down and switch parking places every two hours," he said.

Council President Art LaCroix reminded his colleagues they had asked to hear from the downtown merchants and "this is what they recommend."

Alderman Harold Schmidt reminded, however, that it was the council's intention to get input from the shopper and motorist as well. "And you can't ignore the chief's recommendations. You can't have meters and zoned parking together," said Schmidt.

He suggested the merchants find their own solution.

Alderman Al Wilson recalled that an attempt to establish a parking district downtown, had "died." Through a parking/district, property owners in the district would be assessed to raise funds to pay for off-street parking.

Alderman Charles Swander reminded the council that the idea did not die. It was dropped because of the threat of a referendum and because the state permissive law on parking districts was not clear.

No clear-cut decision was reached when the hearing was closed and the council resumed its regular session to clean up unfinished business from Monday night's meeting.