

# Repeat parking fines may mean stiffer penalties

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A plan to fine people who repeatedly receive tickets for illegal parking downtown is one option being considered by an association of Rapid City's downtown business owners.

Despite new downtown parking lots and a restriping project that created more on-street parking, some downtown business operators and consumers believe there isn't enough parking downtown, said Bryan Schnell, redevelopment director of the Downtown Development Corp.

A major concern is that some downtown employees and downtown residents continue to take up parking spaces that shoppers could use, Schnell said.

"We're looking at the people who would rather get eight (illegal parking) tickets at \$2 a pop than pay for a leased parking spot," Schnell said. "We need to send a clear message that, one, it's cheaper to lease a parking spot and, number two, it's the right thing to do."

One possible solution that has been discussed with city officials is passing an ordinance that would slap an additional fine on a person who repeatedly received tickets for violating the two-hour parking limit downtown.

A questionnaire distributed last April 15 to 5,000 homes in Rapid

City showed that 45 percent of the 816 respondents believed downtown needed more parking and 51 percent said they avoided downtown because of a "bad parking situation."

"People don't like to walk," Schnell said. "We downtowners are willing to accept that from our customers to a degree. But to the retailers, it's unacceptable for employees of some retailers and many offices to park in the street in front of their buildings."

Some people who responded to the questionnaire said they resented it when they came downtown at 10 a.m. and found few people but no place to park.

"They figure a lot of those cars are downtown employees," he said.

"What's the legal recourse for the retailer who depends on walk-in business when the neighbors (in the offices) above him who don't depend on walk-in business have all their employees parking out in front?" he asked.

Schnell said he had talked "until I'm blue in the face" to business owners with employees who parked in front of retail stores.

"It seems they don't care about their neighbor, whether he does well or not," Schnell said.

Schnell said he and others had observed downtown employees who moved their cars a short distance every few hours to avoid getting a ticket.