

Panel backs plan to ease parking

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Finding a parking space in downtown Rapid City may become easier if the Rapid City Common Council passes four recommendations supported Tuesday by its public works committee.

Downtown merchants met with city staff twice in the past week to come up with changes in the city's downtown parking policy that would improve parking availability.

The businessmen, many of whom are members of the Downtown Association, urged the city to increase the length of time persons may park in a metered lot at Sixth and Main streets. Persons shopping or working in the downtown area now are able to use the lot for a maximum of four hours.

The public works committee agreed the length of stay should be increased to 10 hours at 25 cents every two hours.

Committee members also agreed with merchants and city traffic engineer Sharon Johnson, who said more signs should be provided in all downtown parking lots.

Merchants also asked the city to provide better enforcement of on-street parking restrictions. There is a two-hour time limit on downtown on-street parking. But downtown merchants said inadequate enforcement of the provision allowed vehicles to remain in one spot longer, or for motorists to simply move their vehicles a few stalls down the street when the two hours was up, Johnson said.

The merchants urged the city to add a fourth meter maid and extend the hours of enforcement from the current 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. period, to 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. The move would require a person to move a vehicle three to four times during a workday, rather than just two times, they said.

Johnson said hiring another meter maid would cost the city about \$7,000 for the remainder of the calendar year.

Finally, the merchants asked the city to change its policy on lease parking to allow empty spaces to be used at night and on weekends by those who do not hold a leased parking space.

Those people currently leasing a spot from the city have an implied seven-day, 24-hour lease arrangement with the city, Johnson said. Under the proposed change, the lease would be in effect from 3 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, freeing up spaces for use during downtown evening activities and weekend shopping, she said.

There would be no adjustment in fees, under the plan, Johnson said.

She added that most leased spaces were not used at night or on weekends.

"We are trying to come up with something that everyone can live with and will use," Johnson said.

Robert Davis, Salvation Army Thrift Store manager and organizer of the downtown merchants, said he was pleased with the progress of the recommendations and the action of the committee.

"I feel we made a great accomplishment," Davis said following the committee's unanimous approval of the suggestions. "It will mean a great change."

The council will consider the changes during its regular session Monday night.

In another matter, the committee continued discussion of plans for Rapid City Regional Airport's water line project.

The city is trying to determine what route a 6-inch water main should take to the airport's new terminal, slated for completion in the fall of 1988.

A plan already adopted by the council called for the water line to run along U.S. Highway 44 East, then turn north at the existing access road to the airport. An alternate plan would put the water main north of the highway and run through Rapid Valley on a direct route to the airport.

"It appears there is not much cost difference in either route," said Al Foster, a private consultant for FMG Inc. who examined the alternatives. "However, we won't know the true cost (of either alternative) until the bid is let."

The state has approved a grant of \$225,000 for the project which is expected to cost about \$650,000.

Leone "Hokie" Anderson, a Rapid City resident who owns land in Rapid Valley, urged the committee to approve the north water line alternative. Anderson said Rapid Valley residents would pay to be on city water and that a Highway 44 water line would not serve community needs in the future.

Committee chairman Jerry Shoener told Anderson that the city had a policy prohibiting providing its services outside city limits. Bill Craig, operations engineer for the city water and sewer department, added that the state grant prohibited residential tie-ins to the new water main, a measure designed to reduce urban sprawl.

After a lengthy discussion, the council elected to continue the debate until it determined whether the state Water Resources Board would permit its grant to be amended to allow the alternative water line project north of the highway.