

Council rejects proposal to gravel lot

Bill Harlan
Staff Writer

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Downtown Rapid City merchants came up one vote short Monday of getting an extra 60 parking spaces for Christmas.

The Rapid City Common Council rejected by a 5-5 vote a proposal to gravel the east portion of the new St. Joseph Street lot, under construction between Fifth and Sixth streets.

(Mayor Art LaCroix, who could have cast the tie-breaking vote, was not at the meeting.)

The 142-space parking lot was to have been completed this fall, but a snowfall Nov. 7 stopped construction. Then, after downtown merchants

complained of inadequate parking, the city spent an extra \$8,000 to gravel the west portion of the lot. That part of the lot is open now for free, all-day parking.

The gravel is a temporary solution and next spring crews might have to remove it, at still more expense, to pave the lot.

Two weeks ago Public Works Director Leonard Swanson said the east portion of the lot was too muddy for gravel.

Swanson said Monday the ground was drier and that for another \$7,000 or \$8,000 the city could gravel it too.

Alderman Jerry Shoener argued that the city should spend the extra

money to get more benefit from the "million dollar investment" in downtown parking.

Alderman Guy Edwards said opening the extra parking spaces might save some downtown business and protect city property tax revenues.

But Alderman Vickie Powers questioned whether there was a shortage of parking downtown.

"I was downtown Friday and I saw half a dozen spaces available in front of that lot," Powers said.

Powers also asked the council, "Where are we going to come up with the money?"

Shoener said city engineers could work out a plan to lease parking spaces or charge by the hour for part

of the lot to recover some of the extra money spent on gravel.

But Alderman Babe Steinburg said the city would be spending another \$8,000 for only 25 days of parking.

Voting in favor of opening the rest of the lot were aldermen Shoener, Edwards, Carole Hillard, Gale Holbrook and Lisle Owens.

Voting against the plan were aldermen Steinburg, Powers, Joe Bailey, Don Kellar and Harold Weiland.

The lot is part of a \$1 million program to build more downtown parking.

Earlier this year the city bought all the land on the south side of St.

Joseph Street between Fifth and Sixth streets. The city has already spent \$100,000 more than it originally intended because cost of land has been greater than first estimated. And difficulties in acquiring land pushed the construction start back to late August.

Money for the parking construction comes from a half percent sales tax voters approved in 1984, but the extra \$8,000 for gravel came from a parking fund that gets revenue from meters, parking leases and parking fines.

Eventually, the city will use the St. Joseph Street lot for a combination of leased and metered parking.