

Ramp plans discarded in favor of parking lots

(Editor's note: In January 1984 Rapid City voters approved a half cent addition to the city sales tax to pay for three major projects: a downtown parking facility, a new city hall and a new airport terminal.

The tax is expected to raise \$10 million, and collections are "right on schedule," said City Finance Officer Kent Brugger. In addition to sales tax money, about \$435,000 from the sale of city land will be used for the projects.

In the following story and in two others on page 3, Staff Writer Bill Harlan reports on the progress of the three projects.)

Bill Harlan
Staff Writer

Originally, city officials hoped to use money from a half cent sales tax to build a downtown parking ramp. High construction costs and difficult land acquisitions have temporarily scuttled that plan.

Instead, the Rapid City Common Council has decided to buy more land for surface parking lots.

At Wednesday's meeting of the Common Council's legal and finance committee, City Attorney Ray Woodsend was directed to proceed with those acquisitions.

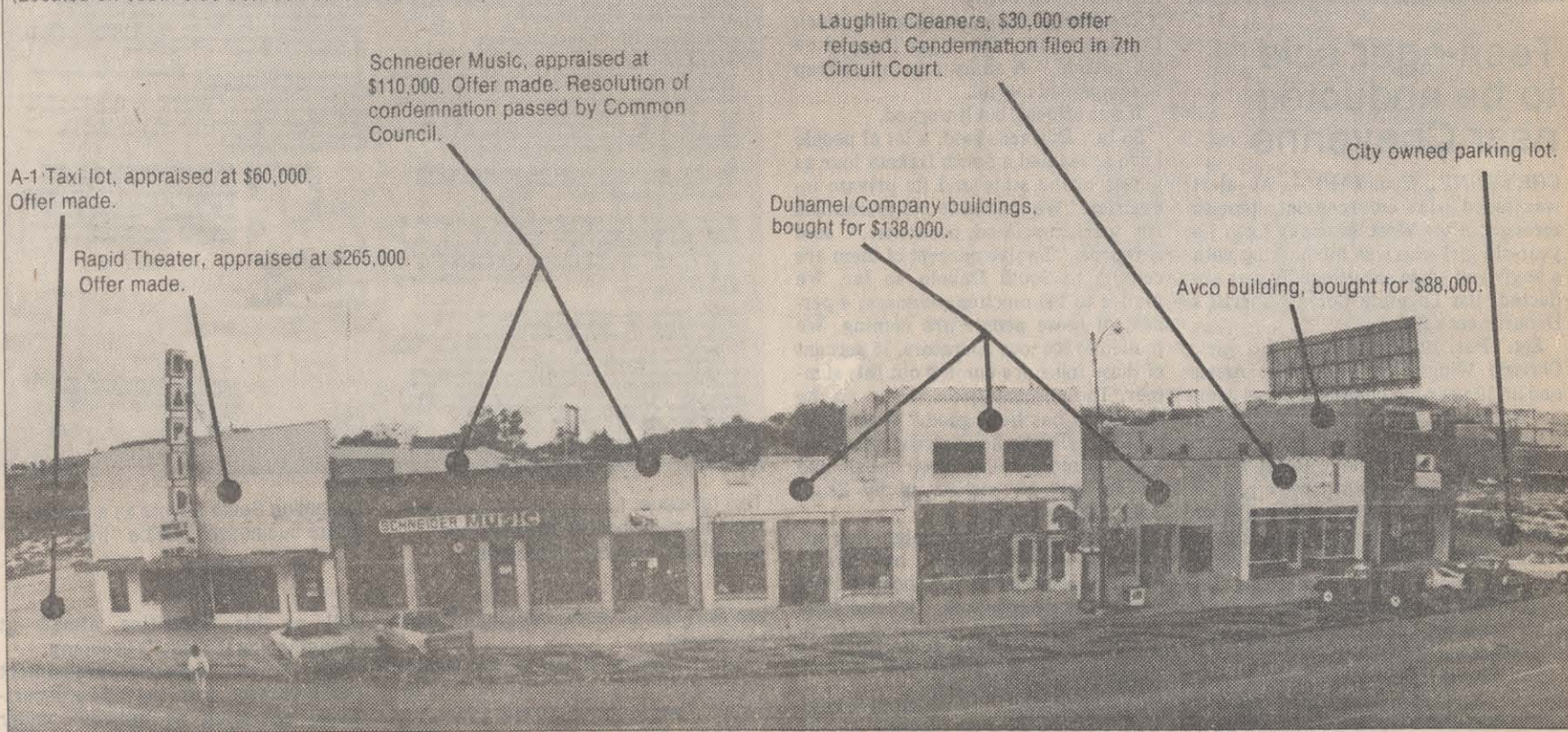
Originally, the Common Council planned a \$1 million, multi-story parking ramp at Sixth and St. Joseph Streets. The ramp would have extended to Schneider Music Co., 509 St. Joseph.

But a later, more detailed analysis showed that even the most inexpensive 240-car ramp would cost more than \$1.3 million.

In February the Downtown Association asked the council to delay a ramp

Future St. Joseph Street parking lot

(Located on south side between 5th and 6th Streets)



and buy more land for surface parking.

The association asked the city to buy Schneider Music, Rapid Theater and the A-1 Taxi lot. All are on the south side of St. Joseph Street, between Fifth and Sixth streets.

The city had already begun negotiations for Laughlin Cleaners, the Avco

building and three buildings owned by the Duhamel Co. (The city owns the lot at Sixth and St. Joseph.)

Downtown Association members also urged the city to buy B & B Towing and Auto Salvage property at 521 Fifth St. and the old Sears warehouse behind it.

Those two lots, they said, could be added to the existing city parking lot on Sixth Street between Omaha and Main Streets.

Building surface parking lots would be quicker and cheaper than building a ramp, association members argued. "We need some relief now," said

association president Anna Marie Thatcher.

Most council members agreed. For example, total land costs for the surface parking plan will be about \$919,000. Demolition and paving will cost \$195,000, according to one city. Please see **Parking** on page 3

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estimate, bringing the total surface parking cost to \$1,114,000.

That's close to the original \$1 million estimate, which included a 10 percent contingency fund. (In addition to sales tax money, the parking lots will be funded by \$250,000 in the parking lot enterprise fund. That money comes from parking fees and fines).

The surface parking plan will also create 221 new parking spaces downtown. A 240-space ramp would only result in a net gain of 174 spaces.

Still, Alderman Harold Weiland thinks the city ought to build the ramp. "We told the public we would build a ramp and we're not doing it," Weiland said at Wednesday's meeting. "We're deceiving the people."

Alderman Jerry Shoener disagreed. "It was just a business decision," he said. "The money for a ramp just isn't there."

But the city is having trouble acquiring land.

The council offered Wallace and Sylvia Olson \$30,000 for Laughlin Cleaners, but the Olsons turned it down.

"The property is worth more to me," Wallace Olson said. "It's a going business, and that makes a difference. They should consider down time and relocation expense."

The city has filed for condemnation in 7th Circuit Court.

Roger Schneider was offered \$110,000 for Schneider Music, but he is still negotiating with the city. The Common Council passed a resolution of condemnation on his property but hasn't filed it. Schneider said he still hopes to reach an agreement with the city.

The city recently bought the three buildings owned by the Duhamel Co. for a total of \$138,000. The city also bought the Avco building for \$88,000.

Woodsend said Wednesday an independent appraiser valued Rapid Theater at \$265,000 and the A-1 Taxi lot at \$60,000. Commonwealth Theaters owns both properties.

B&B Towing and Auto Body on Fifth Street was appraised at \$157,000. The old Sears warehouse behind it was valued at \$71,000.

The legal and finance committee authorized Woodsend to make offers on all four properties.

Part of the reason city officials wanted a ramp was to provide leased spaces for downtown workers, which would free up space on downtown streets.

City Traffic Engineer Sharon Johnson still plans to provide leased parking at two city lots. Her report is expected later this month.