

City may expand lots rather than build ramp

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2-19-85

High-rise parking may give way to the wide open spaces of ground-level lots in downtown Rapid City.

The Common Council Monday night agreed to take the first steps toward expanding two surface parking lots rather than building a multistory parking ramp on the southeast corner of Sixth and St. Joseph streets.

At the request of the Downtown Business Association, the city will look into expanding the existing lot at Sixth and St. Joseph and another lot at Sixth and Main streets.

Anna Marie Thatcher, the business group's president, said the association isn't asking that the parking ramp proposal for Sixth and St. Joseph streets be abandoned.

But a surface parking lot on that site, built "as soon as possible," would help

solve downtown parking problems sooner than the ramp could be built, she said.

And surface parking lots could be cheaper than a ramp, Thatcher noted.

The association also asked that parking meters be restored downtown to raise revenue for the parking lot project, but the council took no action on that proposal.

The association's proposal calls for extending the lot at Sixth and St. Joseph across the block to Fifth Street. It also calls for extending the lot at Sixth and Main through to Fifth Street along Rapid Street, the east-west alley between Main Street and the railroad tracks.

Public Works Director Leonard Swanson said Tuesday that the motion to approve surface parking, made by Alderman Vess "Babe" Steinburg, was taken as a directive to start acquiring the necessary property.

The first step will be to get appraisals on St. Joseph Street property that includes the Rapid Theater and Schneider Music Co. and the Rapid Street property that includes a former Sears warehouse and B&B Towing on Fifth Street. The appraisals then will be given to the council for a decision on what property to take, Swanson said.

In designing the surface parking lots, he said, engineers would try to stay with the \$1 million earmarked for a "parking facility" when voters approved a half-cent increase in the city sales tax.

A parking ramp would have cost about \$1.3 million, including acquisition of property on St. Joseph Street, Swanson said.

City Traffic Engineer Sharon Johnson said either parking ramp or surface parking would add 185 to 195 parking slots to the downtown area.

A parking ramp would have had 250

stalls, but 66 spots in the existing lot and on-street parking would be lost with its construction, for a net gain of 184 stalls.

A surface parking lot on the parking ramp site would provide 85 new spots. Acquiring the whole block from Fifth to Sixth would add another 25 or 30 slots, for a total 110 to 115 new spaces at the site. The Rapid Street extension would add 75 more, for a total gain with surface parking of 190 to 195.

Also Monday night, the council struggled past midnight debating the wisdom of letting neighborhood convenience stores sell liquor, but goofed and moved to ban all liquor sales in residential areas.

Some 25 city residents demanded that the council adopt an ordinance to withhold package liquor licenses from small neighborhood grocery stores. They insisted they weren't asking that

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regular bottle shops be kept out of residential areas, only that liquor be kept out of convenience stores that children enter to buy groceries.

After worrying at length how to define "neighborhood" and "convenience store," council member Norma Thomsen proposed revising the ordinances to ban package liquor sales in convenience stores in areas zoned "neighborhood commercial" and in "general commercial" areas adjoining residential areas.

But in phrasing a motion, she forgot to include the words "convenience store."

Only after her motion passed by a vote of 6 to 2 did anyone realize that without reference to "convenience

store," such an ordinance would keep any liquor store out of the areas.

Council President Guy Edwards pointed out that the oversight could be corrected at a second hearing on Thomsen's measure at the March 18 council meeting.

In other action Monday night, the council:

Heard a report from Rapid Cable TV that cable rates will go up 5 percent, or 80 cents a month for the basic cable service, effective March 1.

Passed a resolution setting revised boundaries of a downtown tax increment district, for financing public projects with increases in property taxes due to rising property values.

Approved dropping sewer charges to Cleghorn Water Association members to \$3.50, but advising the members that their charges will go up next year to be comparable to those charged their neighbors on the city water system.

Sent back to committee an ordinance that would raise the fines for illegally parking in a properly marked "handicapped parking" zone. A definition of signs marking such areas is to be added.