Group to unveil parking proposal

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Staff Writer

A new parking proposal could provide the two things downtown needs most — money and space — if the city will agree to convert free lots into leased parking for downtown workers, a merchants group says.

Anna Marie Thatcher, president of the Downtown Association, said her group wants the city to lease space in its downtown parking lots and change rates and time limits for metered parking.

Downtown parking must start paying for itself, she said in an interview this week.

The association will unveil its latest plan at the Rapid City Common Council’s Public Works Committee Tuesday. The strategy is to steer downtown workers into the leased spaces, thus keeping the free, two-hour street spaces open for shoppers.

“We have to train people to get off the street,” Thatcher said.

How will charging for parking that is now free encourage that? “We want to get management involved,” Thatcher said. “Employers could either pay for their employees’ parking or share the cost. Large businesses have told us, ‘We will pay for parking if you find us some.’”

Under the Downtown Association proposal, the city would lease space at six downtown lots to businesses and their employees. Those lots include the four the city already has and two more it plans to buy. Thatcher suggests charging competitive prices, probably about $15 to $20 per month for a space.

Meters would be installed in lots at Sixth and St. Joseph streets and at Sixth and Main streets.

The plan also calls for changing the metering system to allow three-hour parking for 25 cents in some areas and five-hour parking for 25 cents in others. The city has 535 meters; the proposal calls for 803.

Free on-street parking downtown would not be changed.

Parking is now free at five city lots and metered at a sixth. City meters range from 5 to 10 cents per hour.

City traffic engineer Sharon Johnson said. "Group to unveil parking proposal".
Parking

Continued from page 1 estimates that new meters, gate systems for the leased lots and construction of two surface lots would cost about $200,000.

Thatcher said a preliminary study shows the Downtown Association’s plan could pay for itself in about a year and a half.

After that, income from the parking fees and meters could be used for more expensive parking projects, like a multistory parking ramp.

The Common Council is still considering a plan to build a ramp at Sixth and St. Joseph streets. In January 1984, voters approved a half-cent sales tax, part of which was expected to help pay for the ramp.

At least part of the ramp would be leased, and the lease payments would be used to maintain the facility.

The ramp was initially expected to cost about $1 million. But recent estimates have put the cost higher — at least $1.3 million and as much as $2 million.

Last month, the Downtown Association asked the council to delay building the ramp and use the sales tax money to construct two new surface lots instead. The group said a ramp would require more time and money than the city can afford.

“We need some relief immediately,” she said.

No matter what the city decides, Thatcher thinks parking will have to become more self-sufficient.

“The way we’re operating now, we’re not even generating enough money off meters to generate another staff person to monitor meters,” Thatcher said. “We can’t talk about significant growth (of parking space) until we talk about how to do it financially.”

She also calls the parking problem evidence of a vital downtown. “If a downtown area is dead, there is no problem. But we (downtown merchants and employees) have to realize it’s a problem that belongs to all of us.”