

# Hitch in plans for parking ramp is unfortunate

It may be back to square two for Rapid City's downtown parking ramp.

Square one was filled last spring when city voters <sup>10/1/84</sup> approved a half-cent increase in the sales tax for construction of three major city projects, one of which was the ramp.

Square two was determining the best location for the ramp.

After considering several sites, the Common Council's parking ramp committee settled on property running east from Sixth and St. Joseph streets to the Schneider Music Company building. Even though the estimated cost of the project exceeded the budget, it was felt it would best suit the needs of downtown businesses and the public at large.

The engineering firm hired to design the ramp estimated the cost of building the ramp on St. Joe at \$1.28 million. That was over a quarter million dollars more than had been budgeted but a \$150,000 contribution from downtown businesses would have brought the project closer to the budget figure. City officials felt the difference could be covered by a contingency fund built into the total budget for the three projects.

Two developments now have caused the council to reconsider its decision. The Downtown Association has

withdrawn its offer and owners of the property and the businesses located on them want more money than the price set by the city's appraiser. Those factors could put the project further over budget.

According to engineering estimates, the only recommended site that would accommodate the ramp within the \$1 million budgeted is the city-owned land at the corner of Sixth and Main. However, this is about a block farther away from the concentration of retail businesses on St. Joe which was a factor in the selection of the St. Joe site.

City officials have several options to consider: Decide on another site; try to reach an agreement on price with owners and tenants on the St. Joe Street property and then determine if sufficient money can be wrung from the contingency fund to cover the additional cost (estimates of the revenue to be produced by the additional sales tax were conservative which could allow some wiggle room in the budget); go to condemnation taking the risk that the amount awarded property owners and tenants wouldn't be more than could be negotiated; determine if there is a possibility the offer from downtown businesses might be reinstated.

Only one thing is sure. The most recent developments delay a solution to the downtown parking problem. That's unfortunate.