

Shift from ramp to parking lots makes sense

Shifting the priority for off-street parking in the downtown area of Rapid City from a parking ramp to "flat parking" is a good idea for several reasons.

The Downtown Association which has pushed for additional parking has endorsed the surface lot plan in lieu of building the ramp and city officials have started negotiating with owners of property which could be involved.

The shift from ramp to surface parking would provide as many parking spaces, and perhaps more, than would be available in a ramp for the same or less money. Parking facilities could be built within the amount budgeted from revenue available from the additional sales tax approved last year.

Also, parking would become available sooner because the proposed site or sites could be cleared of existing structures and prepared for surface parking faster than a multi-story ramp could be built.

Plans have been to locate a ramp on a quarter of a block on the southeast corner of St. Joe Street. The surface lot would occupy the entire half block from Sixth to Fifth Streets between St. Joe and the alley. The possibility of

enlarging the lot at Sixth and Main by buying and clearing the land between the alley and the railroad tracks behind Baer's furniture store will also be explored.

From a user standpoint, surface parking lots usually are more attractive than a ramp. They are easier to get in and out of for many drivers and are less ominous from a personal safety standpoint, particularly in hours of darkness.

Committing a half-block of prime downtown property to a parking lot rather than have half of it taken up with a parking ramp would also leave the way clear for future commercial development of the site. A clear half block in that location could be attractive to a private developer. If and when a private developer became interested, it's quite possible a parking ramp could, and would, be part of the development plan.

A parking ramp might give the city a more cosmopolitan image, but right now, more adequate off-street parking is more important than image. Development of "flat parking" will provide more spaces, more quickly and for less money.

Let's get on with it.