

# Chamber offers employee parking incentive

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Rapid City business leaders are looking at a way to encourage employees of downtown businesses to park outside the business district — offer money rewards.

The Chamber of Commerce has proposed that employees park at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center. Employers would pay 25 cents per day for each employee who parked there.

Eighty percent of that money, however, would be returned to employees through a lottery, according to Chamber President John Schmit.

"The incentive has always been there for the employer and the customer to have more parking spaces downtown," Schmit said. "There's never been an in-

centive for the employee. We hope (the lottery) would be the incentive."

If 200 employees park at the Civic Center, Schmit estimates it would bring in about \$1,500 a month. Of that, \$300 would go for administrative expenses and the remaining \$1,200 would go back to employees through the lottery.

Schmit stressed, though, that the idea "is still on the drawing board." He made the proposal to the Downtown Association last week.

Although the Civic Center Board has approved looking into the idea, there has been no firm decision to go ahead, let alone decide how often the lottery would be held or how the money would be split up.

Still, some downtown businesses like the idea, according to Mike Konvalin,

president of the Downtown Association. "Everybody's in favor of it," he said. "They should be."

The proposal calls for a three-month experiment, with employees parking at the Civic Center from June through August. That period has been selected because the weather wouldn't cause problems for walking to work. It would also open up parking spaces for tourists.

If the experiment is successful, Schmit said, it might become a full-time project with a shuttle bus during colder months.

"It will be up to the employers whether or not they're serious enough about an alternative source of parking spaces," he said.

"There won't be anything done until

(the chamber) gets reaction from the various businesses," says Konvalin. "It's just going to be up to each individual business to decide" whether to participate.

During the recent mayoral campaign, each of the three candidates mentioned the possible need for a downtown parking ramp to help solve parking problems. The Civic Center proposal may not completely solve the problem but it is much cheaper. Schmit said the cost of one space in a parking ramp is about \$4,500, compared to the lower cost that would be charged for parking at the Civic Center.

And while a parking ramp hasn't been completely eliminated, this proposal can "hopefully get things started," says Konvalin.