

# City parking study offers no solutions

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A Minneapolis parking consultant has brought Rapid City business people and City Hall together on one point: Nobody likes his downtown parking study.

City Traffic Engineer Sharon Johnson told the Rapid City Common Council's Public Works Committee Tuesday that the report by William C. Arons of Walker Parking Consultants, Minneapolis, revealed nothing anybody didn't already know, ignored several points the city wanted him to study and failed to suggest any real solutions to parking problems.

Arons concluded that the downtown area has 600 too few slots to meet the daily demand for parking and this "exceeds the level of comfort."

Johnson interpreted Arons' words to mean a shortage of parking sends some people to shop elsewhere and discourages some prospective businesses from opening up in the downtown area.

"He doesn't say whether we need additional parking, or a parking garage, which was our original question (in hiring a consultant)," she said.

At the end of the five-page report, for which the city has so far paid about \$1,400, Arons lists four locations where parking lots or parking garages might someday be considered — on the east side of Fifth Street between Main and St. Joseph streets; a half-block area across Ninth Street from the Federal Building; the south side of Kansas City between Seventh and Mount Rushmore Road; and an area between Fifth and Sixth, Main and the railroad track, already partly occupied by a city parking lot.

Three of the sites are occupied by active businesses, which could complicate land acquisition, Johnson pointed out. And the study says nothing about how the city might finance additional parking areas, she said.

But her big complaint was that Arons focused on enforcing parking meter and time limits for shoppers and other short-term parkers rather than the needs of long-term parkers, the

employees of downtown stores and offices.

She said a spot check by city employees recently showed that a large number of people working downtown tied up store-front parking for long periods, occasionally moving their cars to new slots to avoid time limits.

Arons recommended creating four parking zones — a central parking district with two-hour parking and no meters, an area surrounding that with two-hour parking and 25-cent meters, another area surrounding that with a four-hour limit but no meters, and a no-meter, no-limit area beyond that.

Johnson said she probably put more time than Arons did into gathering information for the study. And she added, "I don't think we got our money's worth."

Mayor Art LaCroix told the Public Works Committee that the city won't quit working for solutions to downtown parking problems although results of Arons' efforts were disappointing. "But I don't recommend that we have anything more to do with this guy," he said.

Committee members said they wanted to hear what the Downtown Association thought of the report. That response came quickly at the group's meeting Wednesday morning.

"We don't like it," called one businessman from the audience. "Disgusted is the word," said another, LeRoy Vandestouwe. He said Arons produced some "great ideas" for solving downtown parking problems during earlier discussions with business people. "But they're not in his report. He must have lost them between here and Minneapolis."