

Leased space key to downtown parking ramp

A downtown parking ramp continues to be a clod in the churn for Rapid City officials.

Opposition to the parking ramp made the winning margin in last January's sales tax increase election smaller than it might otherwise have been. Now city officials are encountering difficulty in deciding location of, and determining financial support for, the ramp.

People who favored improvements at the airport and a new city hall still voted "no" on the sales tax increase because the parking ramp was included in the three-project package.

Some opponents contended providing more downtown parking for employees and customers should be the responsibility of downtown businesses and should not be financed by sales tax revenues. Some businesses which provide parking for employees and customers had much the same objection. Some individuals who lease downtown parking spaces were opposed to the sales tax going to provide free ramp parking, particularly if the site was not close to their place of employment.

From the outset, city officials have intended that only the

initial construction costs of the parking ramp would be financed by sales tax revenue. Funds for operation and maintenance were to come from fees with any excess used to develop additional parking facilities.

Leasing space in the parking ramp to individuals or businesses is a key to making it fiscally viable. To help in the siting decision, the committee charged with planning the ramp had hoped to have results of a survey to be taken by the Downtown Association that would indicate how many spaces might be leased and the monthly fees that might be acceptable.

Because the survey was not done, city employees now will conduct a study to determine the best place to locate the ramp based on possible usage.

Long-standing complaints about the inadequacy of downtown parking was a reason for including the ramp among the projects to be built with the sales tax increase. Now that residents throughout the city have given their stamp of approval, the ramp needs support from those who make their living in the downtown area.