

# Trial would show whether parking meters expendable

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A test period during which all downtown Rapid City parking meters would be decommissioned may be the best way to determine whether meters are expendable from a fiscal and parking regulation standpoint.

In conjunction with establishment of a downtown parking district to finance additional off-street parking, the city plans to remove all meters with the exception of those on Main and St. Joe and the cross street blocks between those thoroughfares.

Now downtown businessmen are asking that even the meters slated to be left, not function for a trial period at least. During the period, on-street parking would be regulated by a tire marking system.

One thing such a trial period would show would be the possible shortfall between income and operating expenses. Without meter revenues, the only income would be from fines levied against overtime parkers. Expenses would be for salaries and supplies of parking regulations enforcement personnel.

A preliminary study by the city finance office indicates there would be a deficit but the amount is difficult to determine because of factors which could change with additional off-street parking.

North Dakota is often cited by those who say parking meters are not necessary. Meters were banned statewide in North Dakota in 1948 as the result of initiative petitions.

With a 30-year perspective on the effect of that action, the editor of the Grand Forks Herald recently wrote that it may have been a godsend to the central business districts of the major cities in North Dakota which have not seen their downtowns deteriorate as fast as those in most states.

One effect of the ban was to force cities to recognize the need for more off-street parking downtown. Parking lots were provided, not always as close as many customers would like but close enough to encourage their use by those who worked downtown. Some people who avoided shopping downtown because of their dislike for the meters came back.

If the Grand Forks editor is right, North Dakota was ahead of other states in recognizing the irritation parking meters cause for customers.

A test period without meters in Rapid City would show whether they are expendable here.