City to save downtown tree

What has become sort of a downtown Rapid City hero, the city's living link to 48 years ago, will stand in the center of a new parking lot.

The Common Council's Public Works Committee verbally approved an engineering design Tuesday that will save an elm tree at the expense of only two parking spaces in the new lot at the corner of 6th and Main.

Traffic Engineer Sharon Johnson presented several preliminary designs but the council members favored one that would add 131 parking spaces and keep the tree. It will take a 20' by 20' piece of space.

Milton Chapman, 87, planted the giant elm 48 years ago when he moved into the top floor of his Rainbow Cafe. Three buildings were razed recently to pave the way for the parking lot and the only thing left standing is the tree.

"You wouldn't believe how many phone calls that tree has generated and how many want the tree," said Engineer Bill Craig.

But the now famous symbol of life in the mostly cement and asphalt surroundings has its critics.

Alderman Mike Madden argues the parking lot will be used for many years but the tree might die any time. It will probably get Dutch elm disease, he says.

"Anybody that will develop a parking lot around a 47-year-old tree . . . ought to have his head examined."