

City acquisition of lots ^{8/5/77} at this time questionable

There's a saying that the generals are always preparing to fight the last war.

We tend to think that's the case in plans that are underway to provide off-street parking in downtown Rapid City.

The need for off-street parking to "save downtown" has been talked for a couple of decades but the downtown business community and city administrations were never able to reconcile their ideas as to how to get the job done.

Three years ago, the city established a parking board to serve in an advisory capacity to the council with regard to parking problems.

Following part of a recommendation by the parking board, the Common Council has voted to condemn property next to the Sears store, the property on which the bus depot is located and a lot on the southwest corner of Main and Mount Rushmore Road (commonly referred to as the Patton lot).

We question the wisdom of the city's acquiring this land, most of which is already being used for off-street parking. Acquisition of the land will not change the use of the land but it will take it off the tax rolls.

The rationale given for acquisition is that off-street parking is necessary to redevelopment of the 600 and 700 blocks of

Main Street and to attract tenants to replace major retailers who will be moving to the new shopping mall. City acquisition of the land slated for condemnation will insure that it remains available for parking.

If there was a huge demand for land for building in the downtown area, that argument might be valid. But we don't see that demand developing.

When demolition of buildings in the 600 and 700 block of Main is completed the city will own a lot of land. Hopefully, it will be sold to developers. Until it is, it could be used for interim parking to determine actual usership.

We also have to wonder if city ownership of the lot adjacent to Sears, which will be leaving downtown, might not be a deterrent to a potential tenant who might want to purchase or lease it for parking by his own customers.

The lot on the corner of Main and Mount Rushmore Road is removed from the center of retail activity and we question it will get wide use by shoppers. The city-owned lot at Sixth and St. Joe is much closer to a prime retailing area but is getting far from maximum use.

There's no question that off-street parking in the downtown area was a problem for years. But changing conditions, including the relatively imminent move by two major retailers from downtown, suggests the proposed acquisitions are too late and not the best solution in the light of recent developments.