

Immediate action favored on downtown parking plan

9/20/73

By JACK GETZ
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Rapid City downtown businessmen appear to favor immediate action on the parking portion of a downtown redevelopment plan.

"Generally speaking, there is a note of urgency from almost everyone," said Lloyd K. Pugh, chairman of the Downtown Improvement Committee. "They want things to begin happening as quickly as possible."

Pugh presided at five meetings here Wednesday involving downtown merchants and property owners, Rapid City urban renewal officials and representatives of THK Associates of Denver, Colo., urban renewal consulting firm.

One of the five groups — comprised primarily of St. Joseph Street businessmen — voted unanimously to adopt THK proposals as a preliminary redevelopment plan. Another of the groups — mostly Main Street northside businessmen — indicated dissatisfaction with the proposals, particularly with the idea of razing the 600 and 700 blocks on Main, where their businesses are located.

The other three groups were made up of east downtown businessmen, representatives of the financial and office district, and

persons representing all parts of the business sector. Overall, said Urban Renewal Director Leonard Swanson, they were "disappointed" that Rapid City apparently is not going to have enough money to improve the core business area on the scale that has been proposed.

"Still," Swanson said, "there was a certain amount of optimism, a feeling that we should proceed with planning regardless. Something has to be done anyhow."

Swanson had announced earlier that appraisals of commercial property located in the floodway and northside urban renewal areas have been running considerably higher than anticipated. At one point it appeared that the city would have about \$5 million to spend on improvements in the downtown area, but now it appears there may be only \$1 million or less left over, he said.

The THK proposals would substitute parallel parking for diagonal parking on Main and Kansas City streets, create a three-block mall or semi-mall on St. Joseph Street, scatter 10 parking lots throughout the downtown area and make Kansas City Street an eastbound one-way route. Cost of the entire program has been estimat-

ed at \$5 million to \$8 million. The next step?

"I think what the committee will do now is compile all these comments (from Wednesday's meetings) and then sit down and figure out what to do next," Pugh said. "I really don't know what the next step will be. But I still think it will have to do with parking."

Much still depends on the kind of financial help forthcoming from the urban renewal program, he said.

"Whether we get help or not, something will be done," he said. "I do think there's enough of a feeling among some of the (business) people, at least, that they would take steps on their own, if it comes to such."

Swanson said he is "quite sure" that a request will be made for additional federal funds to finance the downtown project. "Predicting what we'll get, if anything, is another thing," he said.

Downtown parking — or the lack of it — is one of several factors that may be driving Rapid City consumers to outlying shopping centers, the business community was told during Wednesday's meetings. The problem was outlined by Floyd Tanaka of THK Associates, who said nearly all cities are experi-

encing a similar deterioration of downtown viability.

Peter Remmen, another THK representative, explaining the proposal to create a mall on St. Joseph Street, added, "We have tried to create a downtown center that would be attractive to new business, that would be the shopping heart of the city. The real competition comes from outlying shopping centers. The solution is to try to make downtown the place to go."

Since the State Highway Department plans to resurface Main and St. Joseph streets through the downtown area in the near future, a participant asked, would creation of a mall mean that three blocks of new street construction would have to be torn up?

"We've talked to the Highway Department," Swanson said. "We said we're not sure that Rapid City wants a mall. We suggested that they hold up on St. Joe. The Highway Department felt, if the mall is as much as five years away, it is worth the investment. They decided to go ahead."

Remmen pointed out that the Highway Department's plans extend considerably beyond the limits of the proposed mall.

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Other participants in Wednesday's meetings expressed concern regarding the suggested acquisition of the Masonic Temple on Kansas City Street for a parking lot ("I'd hate to see Masonry abolished as a way of life in Rapid City") and proposals to place pedestrian walkways in several alleys ("I couldn't have a tenant in my building if he couldn't get alley deliveries").

Others suggested that consideration be given to multi-level parking lots to eliminate the necessity of acquiring large parcels of downtown real estate for parking. Tanaka pointed out that an asphalt-surfaced ground level lot can be constructed for approximately \$300 per space, while multi-level parking would cost six or seven times as much.

Most of the participants appeared to agree that, urban renewal money or no urban renewal money, action is needed immediately.

"Downtown Rapid City can't wait five years or two years or one year," one summarized. "Something has to be done, or people will be doing all their buying at shopping centers. Five years from now will be too late."