

Off-street parking dead issue for now

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For all intents and purposes, any thought of the city providing additional off-street parking for the downtown Rapid City area is a dead issue—at least for this or the coming year.

Action by the City Planning Commission last Friday and anticipated approval by the city council Monday, which will establish priority areas for a Neighborhood Development Program, almost rules out any federal funds for acquiring and clearing land downtown for off-street surface parking.

While a recent "Interim Parking Study," prepared by THK and Associates of Denver, does not contemplate use of federal funds to provide off-street parking, Floyd Tanaka of THK points out if the city undertook such a project, any local funds used could be applied as credit toward the city's participation in other urban renewal efforts.

Federal money possible

Including a potential parking lot in a priority area, however, just might have opened the door to some federal money to help with land acquisition and site clearance. On the other hand, as Tanaka points out, if the city could provide the added downtown parking lots on its own—through a proposed parking district—it would be like money in the bank, provided the city's NDP application is approved within three years after the start of a parking lot project.

Tanaka's Interim Parking Study proposes the city acquire four existing privately owned parking lots around the downtown core area. The city could expand the lots which presently have a capacity of 238 cars, by acquiring additional land, razing the structures and paving the added space.

In Tanaka's proposal, which would cost an estimated \$1.27 million, the city could gain 336 new off-street parking spaces.

It could be financed, he points out, partly through the Parking Lot and Area Fund, which is composed of 50 per cent of the net parking meter receipts after expenses. To supplement this fund, which realizes about \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year, the city should establish a "parking district" downtown on which state law permits assessments to raise the necessary funds to provide public parking facilities.

Proposal pigeon-holed

This could still be done, but for the time being the Interim Parking Study proposal has been pigeon-holed until a proposed civic center project is off the ground.

While a token effort might be made to lease the old Black Hills Olds used car lot at the corner of Fifth and St. Joe, it would add only 55 or 60 stalls when the downtown recently has lost at least 137 on-and off-street parking spaces.

The old city parking lot on Quincy between Sixth and Seventh had 169 spaces. This area now is the site of the new public library and the number of spaces left will be about 54 for a net loss of 115 spaces. Also, a change in the traffic pattern on Rushmore Road between Main and St. Joe, cost another 22 on-street parking stalls.

A Central Business District Parking Survey conducted by the State Highway Department in Rapid City in 1965 showed that within the downtown area the city has 3,690 parking spaces.

Of these 1,951 are private and public parking spaces in off-street lots. Of the remaining 1,739 curb parking facilities, 1,190 are metered and some 549 are unrestricted.

This study indicated there was a need for at least 125 additional spaces in the "core area" at that time and this deficiency would increase to about 375 spaces by 1985.

Tanaka's analysis of the 1965 parking survey notes the projected need is based on a "limited status quo" of the natural growth rate of downtown. The report points out the relocation of any major facility or the location of any new facility would distort the projections.

The Tanaka study notes that several changes have been or are planned. For instance, the new library already under construction and a proposed federal office building have and will change the projections. In light of these and other changes, he considers the state's projected deficiency as "conservative."

Considering the deficit of 125 spaces six years ago and the loss of 137 spaces since then, Tanaka's proposal to provide 336 additional spaces does not seem unreasonable.

The National Parking Association has recommended a number of actions municipalities can take to alleviate parking problems. Among them, to conduct a survey and publicize the results. (We

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have had two in the last six years and they have been publicized.

Other suggestions include effective utilization of existing parking space by enforcing curb and metered parking regulations. While downtown merchants complain of businessmen and employes who occupy prime curb space by "feeding" the meters, Tanaka's analysis of the 1965 survey points out the significance of the short duration of motorists parking for "work," which averaged just under three hours per trip.

Tanaka comments this time would indicate that within the study area (downtown business area), there is "not a preponderance of employes who park all day while working."

The NPA also suggests installing signs directing motorists to off-street parking space.

Unfortunately, says the NPA, parking does not lend itself to easy solution. Public attitudes toward parking are an amalgam of emotional, psychological, economic, political and social points of view.

"This makes it difficult to extract the reality of the problem from the maze of personal opinions and guesswork."

Any solution to Rapid City's downtown parking problems will take the active cooperation of businessmen-merchants, motorists - shoppers, civic officials, parking operators, property owners and — the voters.