Replacing the Harney Hotel with city parking lot deserves support

A nickle still buys an hour's worth of parking in Rapid City, and probably will continue to do so for some time yet.

That's not the case, however, in many cities. If you go to Billings, Mont., you will find some of its meters require a dime per hour, double what the fee was before Dec. 1. At that, though, the cost to park is not nearly so painful as it is in Denver or Minneapolis.

So accustomed are we to dropping in a nickle and walking away, we forget what purpose is served by extracting this money from our pockets. The philosophy of parking meters is that they help regulate parking so that each space might become available at intervals. And the charge, in addition to paying the overhead involved in maintaining the meters and policing, is to accumulate a fund from which more parking improvements can be bought.

Mayor Don Barnett reported to the city council Monday night that the parking lot and area fund now has grown to something more than $142,000. And, he announced, plans are underway for the city to acquire the Harney Hotel property through tax deed and establish a metered parking lot after the building is razed. Money from the parking lot and area fund would be used for this project.

The plan should be implemented, for the Harney Hotel location fits well with other projects that are either committed or seem likely to bear fruit. It is only a block from the site between Main and St. Joe already designated for the new federal office building that Rapid City is to receive. It also is directly south of the site recommended for a new civic center on Omaha Street. And it is within the business loop where on-street parking problems are most pressing.

The Harney Hotel obviously has fallen on hard times. True, much of the city's early history occurred there. For instance, it was the headquarters for cattle baron Corb Morse and from this once proud building General Nelson A. Miles directed an unfortunate war against the Indians who perished at Wounded Knee on Dec. 29, 1890. But long ago, the Harney lost its prominence. Time has not been good to the building and architecturally it qualifies not at all as a landmark worth preserving. Nor is it any longer safe.

Razing the old hotel would be a contribution toward tidying up the downtown area. Renewal of the business district can be advanced by the city's proposal to provide more off-street parking space.

The nickles that go through the parking meters each day can make this a reality. The proposal deserves support.