

Parking task force seeks solutions

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff writer

4/4/96

SANDPOINT — Downtown Sandpoint is home to several dozen businesses, 800 employees — and only 300 paid parking spots.

It's no wonder many workers have resorted to using on-street parking, said Councilwoman Sue Haynes, chairman of the city's parking task force.

"What we're trying to do is address the needs of all people who park downtown — customers, business owners and employees," she said.

A public hearing on the issue is tentatively set for mid-April. Suggestions and ideas will be incorporated into a final plan which will be presented to city and highway district officials.

"We want something that's fair for workers, that's fair for everyone," said Haynes.

The task force has met several times and drafted preliminary plans to tackle the city's

parking problems. Its overall goal is to coordinate discussion between key agencies and downtown businesses to draft solutions to Sandpoint's chronic parking problems.

"The biggest problem continues to be too many spaces are taken up by business owners and employees," said Haynes.

To handle ongoing challenges, some members have suggested a return to parking meters, she said.

"A lot of cities are going back to meters," Haynes added. "It would generate some revenue that could be used to generate more parking spaces."

Task force members also said it would eliminate any questions on how long someone has parked in a spot and how much time remains.

However, suggestions to increase diagonal parking may not be possible, she said. Many streets are not wide enough or, like First and Cedar, are considered state highways and are restricted to parallel parking.

Until a bypass is built, the situation is unlikely to change.

The goal of the group is to draft a plan to maximize existing spaces "and better use what we have now," said Haynes. Any suggestions are likely to be implemented in stages, and would address all aspects of the city's complex parking needs.

That "complete plan" would address the needs of shoppers, tourists, business owners and employees, she said.

"What we're trying to do is what's best for downtown Sandpoint," added Haynes.

Key to that discussion may be what the city decides to do with its 125-space lot. A one-year management agreement with Diamond Parking is up June 15 and the city could opt not to renew the lease.

A second major area that needs to be addressed is employee parking, Haynes said.

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GOT A NEWS TIP OR A STORY?

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Informal surveys show many of the parking spaces in downtown Sandpoint are used by business owners or employees.

While several downtown businesses pay for employee parking, others rely on on-street parking that could be used by customers. That's a trend the task

force would like to see expanded.

"A lot of people don't realize that parking costs money, that someone paid to construct it, someone paid to strip it," Haynes said. "There are costs associated with all parking."

**TRESTLE CREEK
OPENING SOON
SEE "BERT" AND
"DOUG"**

Council puts brakes on parking plan

4/18/96

Will take second look at how to utilize its downtown lot

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff writer

SANDPOINT — The City Council has put the brakes on a plan to take back control of Sandpoint's downtown parking lot.

Wednesday's vote to return the matter to committee, voids a proposal to cancel a one-year lease with Diamond Parking for management of the lot.

A parking task force had recommended the city take over management of the lot, with two-thirds of the spaces for rent on a monthly basis.

The decision was made to give the city time to talk to Diamond officials about revisions in the contract, and take advantage of the company's expertise in the field.

Because the parking issue is "very, very complicated," council chairman Michael Boge said the city wanted to take its time to draft a consistent and comprehensive plan.

That plan would include parking in the city lot as well as on-street parking throughout the downtown core.

Under the terms of the lease, either side can end the contract with 30 days notice. The lease has generated about \$4,000 since it was signed June 17, 1995. The funds have gone into the city's general fund to help offset parking costs.

Regardless of who manages the lot, it's expected that the cost of monthly permits to park in the lot will drop to \$15. Permits now cost \$25 per month, an amount both sides concede as too high.

"It's been difficult trying to come up with a win/win solution. The city is doing real good, but I'm not sure we're getting any cooperation."

**— Sandpoint Mayor
David Sawyer**

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The decision follows a community forum several days earlier, which sparked a two-hour debate over the best way to tackle the ongoing problem.

Several residents called for the city to return the lot to a free status, saying that option is the only one which will free up parking and be fair to all sides.

Others suggested a review of the city's loading zones, many of which are improperly marked or

Over the years, the city has considered everything from buying additional lots to building a multi-story parking structure to re-installing meters in the downtown.

Paid parking in the lot has created a larger perimeter of parking around the downtown business core as drivers seek to park for free, said Mayor David Sawyer.

"The biggest frustration of our parking monitor is the amount of cars driven by downtown business employees and business owners who play center with

many of them working at local real estate offices. The city issues between 325 and 400 parking citations — at \$10 each — per month.

"A lot of people pay great lip service to keeping the downtown vital, but a lot of those same people park on the street and get as close as they can," said downtown business owner Ben Tate.

Councilman Ray Miller suggested it may be time for the city to get out of the "parking business" and sell or lease the lot

management of the lot.

While the city would the option if a viable gr forward, so far no expressed any inter Sawyer.

"It's been difficult to come up with a win/win he said. "The city is doing good, but I'm not sure we're getting any cooperation."

In Coeur d'Alene ordinances limit unpaid parking two hours per day per Cars are monitored through hand-held computer.

City to try out new parking plan

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff writer

SANDPOINT — City officials hope a lower price will help fill its empty downtown parking lot.

And, if that doesn't work, a city task force said tougher measures — including restrictions on two hour parking — may be next.

Under the plan, monthly parking fees at the lot will drop almost in half to \$15. Diamond Parking would continue to manage the lot on a two-month trial basis.

The council unanimously approved the recommendation Wednesday.

The option was one of three possibilities debated by the task force. Those rejected include a return to parking meters or adoption of an ordinance that limits parking to two hours per vehicle per day.

Any money collected would go into an enterprise fund dedicated

to future parking solutions or downtown improvements.

Coeur d'Alene Finance Director John Austin said the city had many of the same problems before it switched to managed parking several years ago.

"When we privatized that function, it changed everything," he said. "People now know they can't do the two-hour shuffle any more."

The city now receives \$135,000 a year in fees, with 60 percent going to an enterprise fund to improve existing lots or buy new ones.

Like Coeur d'Alene, managed parking is the city's first step in drafting an overall parking plan. The task force is working to identify future steps to improve parking in the city's downtown core.

The cities' downtowns are roughly the same size, with Coeur d'Alene's downtown covering a three-block by seven-block area and Sandpoint's

downtown covering a four-block by five-block area.

Coeur d'Alene limits drivers to two hours free parking per day and monitors vehicles using a hand-held computer. With the ordinance, the city is able to use some flexibility to target habitual offenders.

"The question is, who do you serve — the 800 people who work downtown or the 10,000 people who live here and want to come downtown," said Austin.

Attempts to avoid on-street parking limits is the biggest problem facing the city, said Police Chief Bill Kice. The need to control that aspect of the city's parking problem is the reason behind a suggestion to return to meters.

The city collected \$10,000 in parking fines in the past four months, with \$2,600 collected in April alone.

Regardless of what the city does, it still faces the problem of too many employees competing

for too few parking spaces, said several task force members.

"We're still stuck with the problem of not having enough space," said Sandpoint Planning Director Greg Doyon.

And, in considering new suggestions, the city needs "avoid the concept of overselling the city parking lot," said task force member Bob Fischer.

Future efforts to manage the city's parking could include parking limits at City Beach, with the first two hours free. That option was strongly supported by Austin and Diamond Parking regional manager Dan Geiger.

"City Beach will generate a lot of revenue," Austin said. "I know that's a sacred cow but so will ours."

SANDPOINT
CINEMA

4/13/98

THE BEE'S VIEW

City right to pull out of deal with Diamond

A good idea gone bad.

That's one way to describe the city's deal with Diamond Parking to management its downtown parking lot.

It didn't work out too well.

For the most part, the lot sat empty shortly after the regulation of paying to park there was put into effect. It's not that the cost was all that high (\$25 a month), but that people here — whether they're employees, employers, shoppers or visitors — don't want to pay to park their car. They'd rather drive around for a few minutes to find a free spot.

The city was right to opt for the paid parking concept last year because trying to find a place for your car downtown was then and still is no easy task. Its downtown lot was jammed with cars from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Business owners were concerned that there was no place for visitors to park and peruse local shops. Had the paid parking idea worked, the city could have raised funds toward building a larger downtown parking garage.

But going to paid parking hasn't worked with Diamond, and the city is right to get out of the lease and look for a new solution.

However, things probably won't improve with the city managing the lot on its own and leasing spots for \$15 a month. Even at that price, which is about as inexpensive as it gets, people likely won't pay to park. I doubt a lottery to determine who gets the paid parking spots will be necessary.

And meters in front of downtown shops are not the answer, especially not with free parking at Bonner Mall, K mart and the Wal-Mart to open soon in Ponderay. Downtown shop owners have enough challenges to face without customers being scared off by the site of a parking meter (Unless it was an antique type where you are charged a nickel an hour. They might find that amusing).

What is the answer to alleviate the parking problems in downtown Sandpoint? Maybe bike- or walk-to-work programs with some incentives for those that do it. Maybe a return to free parking in the downtown lot? If you have the answer, attend the public form Tuesday, 5:30 p.m. at City Hall on the issue.

This problem could use — and should get — some community input.

BILL BULEY
Daily Bee editor

Council expands city business parking

But it means employees must find other places for their

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff writer

SANDPOINT — Sandpoint's downtown business core just got a little bit larger.

In a move to open up parking on Church Street, the Sandpoint City Council approved a change to expand the city's business core. The change limits parking to two hours on the south side of Church Street between Third and Fifth avenues.

The limits take effect today.

The move follows complaints by several business owners, who blamed limited parking in the area on employees and a change to paid parking in the nearby city

lot.

With most of the businesses on the street providing off-street parking, it was unfair to let others use the street for employee parking, said Councilwoman Susan Haynes.

"We are concerned about where employees are going to park," she said. "It's not that we don't care about where the post office and other employees are going to park.

"It's just that these people made sense."

The city was asked to leave parking as is by Sandpoint Postmaster Louise Soles. Because the post office lot is dedicated to customers, she told city officials that employees have nowhere else to

park.

When the council switched to paid parking last fall, members knew it would create problems, Councilman Ray Miller said. However, members also hoped to generate ongoing talks with the chamber and area businesses on possible solutions, he said.

However, because people are avoiding the city lot, it's hard to know which areas are being hit the hardest, said Police Chief Bill Kice.

The council also plans to explore downtown parking concerns through a new city task force. The group plans to target a variety of parking issues for the entire Sandpoint business district.

Input will be gathered. Identifying the city's planning and Sandpoint Commission, the Sandpoint Highway District, the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce.

Sandpoint Mayor David said he hopes formal task force will help address issues on a citywide basis. The action follows a plan raised by Church Street business owners.

"Although the city has those particular needs, the safety committee expressed the hope that concerns could be addressed on a larger scale for all businesses."

GOT A NEWS TIP OR A STORY IDEA? CALL THE DAILY BEE AT 263-9534

City puts parking plan in reverse

Will take back control of downtown lot

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff writer

SANDPOINT — The sparkle has dimmed on the city's lease with Diamond Parking for management of its downtown parking lot.

Sandpoint has informally notified the parking company it plans to take back control of the lot when the lease expires June 30. It's likely the city will manage the lot on its own, leasing 80 of the spots for a \$15 monthly fee and setting aside the other 40-plus spots for short-term parking.

If there is a high demand for the spots,

the city would hold a lottery to determine who would receive parking permits, said Councilwoman Sue Haynes. Haynes is chairman of a committee looking at possible solutions to the city's ongoing parking problems.

The committee has met several times in the past month on the issue.

Discussions have been rooted in several basic assumptions, that Sandpoint has a parking problem, that businesses are hurt by the lack of parking and that much of the problem is caused by employees and business owners.

"Trying to park in downtown Sandpoint

Forum set to tackle parking problems

SANDPOINT — The city of Sandpoint will host a public forum to discuss parking issues Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will be held in the council chambers.

Everyone affected by downtown parking concerns, including customers, office workers and retail business owners and employees are encouraged to attend. Questions concerning the forum may be directed to the city clerk's office at 263-3310.

A parking task force has met several times in the past month to discuss ways to maximize existing parking. Members of the task force include representatives from the city, Sandpoint Independent Highway District, Sandpoint Planning Commission, Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce and downtown businesses.

is at best a frustrating experience," said Haynes.

To ease frustrations and free up parking, the committee has debated several options

— including a return of parking meters. Other options include loading zones, curb

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cuts and a bike-to-work program.

A return to parking meters was soundly rejected by downtown shoppers and business owners, including Eve's Leaves owner Marilyn Sabella.

While the move to reclaim control of the city lot is sound, Sabella said the message sent by installing parking meters would hurt Sandpoint's downtown core.

"If shoppers see a row of parking meters, they just say adios," she said. "There should be a sense of welcoming a customer instead of putting an obstacle in their way."

Elimination of parking meters was the first thing a consultant advised the former Central Business Association to do in response to construction of the Bonner Mall. The city removed its meters in the early 1980s.

With Wal-Mart set to open this

summer, the last thing the city should do is something which would discourage shopping in its downtown, said Sabella.

"I won't do anything to make customers feel unwelcome and I can't bear to see the city do the same thing," she said.

Committee members had eyed meters as a way to discourage the worst offenders from parking in prime spaces in the downtown core.

City officials estimate that 80 percent of the parking in the

downtown core is taken up by employees and business owners. Ordinances requiring one parking space for every 250 square feet only apply to new construction.

Existing businesses are grandfathered and don't need to meet that requirement, said Police Chief Bill Kice.

"We probably oversold the city parking lot by 300 percent," he said. "We're now left with this problem to fix and there's no way to go back."