

Citizen's envision parking for all – or maybe no parking downtown

By Jeanne Davant

Could Manitou Springs' downtown become a pedestrian-friendly, vehicle-free Zone?

That was one of the ideas proposed at a -parking problems potluck and workshop held May 25 in City Hall.

Participants got together to enjoy a potluck supper and ponder several questions regarding parking, in a format that has become the standard for community meetings that are being held in conjunction with the development of an updated vision plan for the city.

While the parking problems meeting and a follow-up parking solutions meeting are separate from that process, the results likely will inform the update to the 2000 Rainbow Vision Plan that's being developed by Manitou Springs Forward.

The parking problems meeting focused on identifying what the community values and expects in terms of a parking plan.

Divided into small groups of three to seven people, about 25 participants talked about what they hoped could be achieved by implementing a parking plan, concerns about implementing a plan and what community expectations should guide the city when making parking solutions decisions.

Making downtown more user-friendly by eliminating parking and traffic, more parking for everyone and striking a balance between visitors' and residents' needs were among the objectives participants suggested.

Concerns included residents being thrown under the bus for the sake of business, shifting parking problems from one area to another and the cost of implementing a parking program.

City Councilman Matt Carpenter, who participated in one of the group discussions, said he was concerned about community apathy, noting that only 27 people responded to an online survey on the city's web site May 11 through 20 and that fewer than 30 people attended the parking potluck.

Participants in the meeting said their expectations included maintaining Manitou's small-town feel and current ambiance and that the solution would result in more pedestrians and less traffic. All parking in town should be a part of the plan, they said.

Consulting firm Kezziah Watkins facilitated the parking problems meeting and will do the same for the next meeting.

The consultants reported on the results of the online survey and a downtown survey conducted May 14.

In the downtown survey, volunteers asked people on Manitou Avenue several questions regarding their experiences in parking.

Of the 105 respondents, 77 percent said they had had problems parking in Manitou Springs that day. Of those, 83 percent said they had a difficult time finding an available space, and 61 percent said they couldn't find a space to park without having to pay for it. Less than half of the respondents said they had to park too far away from where they wanted to go, had trouble with the paid parking kiosk, needed to park longer than three hours, or had a problem with the size of the space.

One hundred percent of the 27 respondents to the online survey said they believed there is a parking problem in Manitou Springs, and 54 percent ranked parking as the biggest issue facing the community.

Besides providing information about where they lived (77 percent of the respondents live in Manitou), the survey participants offered comments about the parking situation and their ideas about solutions.

"I have lived in Manitou 35 years and am thinking of moving because traffic and parking have become such a nightmare," one respondent said.

"No parking meters," another wrote.

"Close the Incline," said another.

Consultant Tweed Kezziah stressed that the surveys were not a scientific random sample and should be considered as snapshots of sentiment at the time they were taken.

Input from the two surveys will be included in a summary document the consultants will prepare after the final parking meeting on June 9.

Parking problems identified

The second parking-related potluck and workshop, set for 6 p.m. June 9 in City Hall, will focus on solutions. Community members are invited to attend, whether or not they went to the first meeting. The discussions and will be based on the issues identified at the May 25 potluck:

Hopes for a parking plan

- More parking for all
- Close-in parking for employees
- Better publication of where parking is—maps, etc.
- More efficient striping
- Better signage
- Move "downtown" further west
- Some type of multilevel parking structure with solar panels or garden to make it user friendly, cost effective
- No parking or traffic in downtown to make community more user-friendly
- Bicycle program
- Same number of people, fewer cars
- More consideration for residents' needs
- Provide for tourists but preserve integrity of town
- Happy residents, happy shop owners, and striking a balance between the two
- Use existing resources like school parking lots
- More pedestrians, less traffic

Concerns

- Lack of communication when a plan gets implemented—keep it simple
- Not providing free parking
- Look of a structure if that happens
- Cost of the solution
- Financing
- Master plan of what's going on with different developments including zip line and amphitheater on the west end; would like to see a master plan with no parking downtown
- West side needs to be looked at for a parking structure
- Impact on residents
- Residents being thrown under the bus for the sake of business
- Rental properties causing a squeeze on parking inventory

- Shifting parking problems from one area to another
- Prospect lot area might become used for Incline parking and turn the area into another Ruxton Avenue
- Emergency services
- Shuttles and remote lots don't seem to work
- How we pay for real solutions
- Community apathy

Expectations

- Maintain a small-town feel
- Give residents places to park
- Find another place to park for visitors
- Community might have unrealistic expectations in that it does not cost them
- Retain current ambiance
- Broad-based payment scheme
- No particular group favored
- More pedestrians, less traffic
- Timeline for the plan
- Community needs to be involved in knowing what the timeline is
- Use spaces we have
- Access to neighborhood parking — parking stickers
- Everybody should have access to their residences
- Provide real-time parking information — signage, an app, communication
- All parking would be managed

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