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County weighs in on dispute Stoppgap measure provides off-site weekend parking

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO, STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL -- The town stepped in three months ago, and now the Orange County commissioners are trying to help.

Spencer Young, the owner of The Courtyard of Chapel Hill, and P.H. Craig, who owns most of the parking space associated with The Courtyard, have been unable to negotiate a lease agreement for 56 out of 79 parking spaces since Young bought the retail and office complex two years ago.

At the end of July, Craig blocked off his part of the parking lot, leaving only 23 parking spaces and putting The Courtyard out of compliance with its development permit. Craig and Young have both applied to change the permits in order to avoid \$100 daily fines.

A month later, the town bagged the meters for 35 on-street parking spaces on Cameron Avenue, reserving them for Courtyard employees. Town traffic engineer Kumar Nepalli said those spaces would be reserved until Young can find a permanent alternative.

"Everybody's working to get some resolution," Nepalli said.

This week, the Orange County Board of Commissioners agreed to lease Young about 60 parking spaces at the Skills Development Center and the Visitor's Bureau, just across Roberson Street from The Courtyard.

For a monthly fee of \$125, Young will use the county's lot for valet parking on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights from 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. for the next six months.

But Lex Alexander, owner of 3 Cups coffee shop at The Courtyard, said valet parking on weekend nights won't help those shops that do most of their business during the day.

"3 Cups hours of operation are until 7 p.m. Sandwich closes at 4 p.m. LocoPops closes at 6," he said. "Spencer Young's stop-gap measure to replace critical parking we are promised in our lease with valet parking is not helpful to our businesses.

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"We are 'in and out' businesses that must have convenient self- parking," he said. "Have you ever heard of using valet parking to purchase a popsicle, a cup of coffee or a BLT? "

Efforts to reach Young were not successful.

The weekend parking plan may be most useful to restaurants Penang and Bonne Soiree, but Penang owner Celine Thurstone said the real problem is at lunchtime when the on-street meters are running and nearby spaces are full anyway.

"Our lunch is not busy anymore," she said.

Bonne Soiree owner Tina Vaughn said complaints about the lack of parking are overblown, but she understands things are worse during the day, before her restaurant opens.

"[Parking in the county's lot is] lovely on the weekends," she said, "but it would be nice if they could do it during the week as well."

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