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Town and Others Have Tried to Help

Feuds with everyone

## Town may settle lot dispute

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Parking in downtown Chapel Hill is a problem once again as two property owners are in conflict over the lot that sits in front of the Courtyard shopping center on West Franklin Street.

At the center of the dispute are Spencer Young, who bought the Courtyard in 2005, and P.H. Craig, who owns about 50 spaces on the lot next to the Courtyard.

Craig has blocked off his 50 spaces, causing customers and employees to scramble around town for parking. He said the situation was simple: Young "hasn't paid me in two years."

Craig said there was once a contract in place where he received payment for his spaces. The contract has since expired, and he said he wants compensation for use of his part of the lot.

Lousy Landlord

"I feel bad for the tenants," Craig said, referring to the shop owners who are stuck in the middle.

Fiscally Irresponsible

The situation has become so untenable that local business owner Lex Alexander asked the Chapel Hill Town Council to intervene. Alexander, who owns the 3Cups coffee and wine shop in the Courtyard, asked the council to take punitive action.

"The only way these two property owners are going to cooperate is to be fined," he said at a council meeting Monday night.

Alexander said the town council issued a special-use permit to the former owner of the Courtyard and Craig that allowed for cooperation between the parties. Alexander said that when he signed the lease for his business in 2003, the contract stipulated that there were 79 spaces available for tenants. Since July, there have been only 27.

Liz Parham, executive director of the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership, said it is very important for the problem to be solved.

"The Courtyard is a strong anchor for the west end that houses very good businesses," she said.

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She said the feud causes a "real parking crunch all over the west end" that has a domino effect on the rest of downtown. Parham said that employees end up taking most of the spots, driving away customers.

In August the partnership offered to help the two owners come to a solution by hiring a mediator. Ultimately, Young and Craig hired their own mediator, a lawyer from Raleigh.

Craig said the two parties "got absolutely nowhere and nothing changed" during mediation.

Feuds with everyone

Parham said some temporary measures have been put in place. The town is letting employees use the metered spaces on Cameron Avenue and is providing a shuttle.

After hearing Alexander speak at the town council meeting on Monday, Mayor Kevin Foy said he and the council would refer the situation to town staff and then ask for recommendations. He did indicate that "maybe it's time for us to bring enforcement action."

Craig said he sees no quick fix, saying, "I don't know. I don't have any solutions."

Young had not returned phone calls as of Wednesday night.

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