

Friday, April 10, 2009

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Parking dispute may resolve

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Published: Tuesday, February 19, 2008
Updated: Wednesday, July 2, 2008

Additional downtown parking might be on the way.

The Chapel Hill Town Council heard plans at a public hearing Monday which could create up to 130 parking spots off South Roberson Road.

The spaces have been part of an ongoing battle between Spencer Young, owner of the office and retail facility The Courtyard at 431 W. Franklin St., and P.H. Craig, the owner of the parking lot next to it.

The current plan requires that Craig rent the spaces to Young.

Scott Radway, who said he was speaking on behalf of Craig, asked the council to consider releasing Craig from the special use permit and rezoning the parking lot area.

"Mr. Craig hasn't been paid for two and a half or three years," Radway said.

Craig has closed the spaces off to patrons and tenants of The Courtyard, causing the council to issue parking permits.

The parking lots have remained closed despite efforts by the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership to mediate a resolution to the conflicts between Craig and Young.

"This application gives Mr. Craig an ability to move forward, too, and we think that's really important," Partnership Executive Director Liz Parham told the council.

The council and mayor expressed optimism that the application would be quickly approved and would help add parking to downtown.

"One of our requests tonight is to go forward with an expedited review," Radway said.

Parham suggested that the council rezone even more space than Radway proposed from residential to downtown zoning.

"It's actually a nice little footprint that could be extended," she said.

The Downtown Partnership is paying for a comprehensive parking study to address resident and business concerns of access to free parking, although there are already more than 3,000 spots downtown.

"Part of that parking study is to look for under-utilized sites," she said.

Last week the council heard public concerns about changes to the downtown towing ordinances which would make it more difficult for tow truck operators to work in the area.

Towing is a major concern downtown, where many park illegally when they can't find legal parking spaces.

The council had already given patrons of The Courtyard, which includes LocoPops and coffee and wine shop 3Cups, several spaces to help ease what owners have said is a threat to business.

The beginning of the council meeting Monday was filled with people in orange shirts who showed up to support the application of the Orange United Methodist Church to build a new sanctuary and parking, which may be used as a park and ride lot for the University.

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