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Town and Others Tried To Help



Courtyard valet parking allowed

County approves temporary agreement to relieve stress at downtown center

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Article Text:

CHAPEL HILL -- Orange County is taking a shot at alleviating the parking troubles that plague customers and employees of The Courtyard commercial center on the corner of Franklin and Roberson Streets.

The Orange County Board of Commissioners has approved a license agreement with Courtyard owner **Spencer Young** that clears the way for temporary valet parking in the county-owned Skills Development Center and Bentley Building, both across the street from The Courtyard.

According to terms outlined in a county agenda abstract of the request that was passed by consent, Young must secure business insurance coverage for the lots and both parties will have to approve conditions of the deal before The Courtyard may access the parking.

Skills Development Center and Bentley Building parking spaces will be available for valet parking only between 5 p.m. and 12 a.m. from Friday through Sunday.

County documents indicate that the agreement is for six months and "under no circumstances would the time frame be extended beyond six months."

Pam Jones, purchasing director for Orange County, could not pinpoint a start date of the agreement, saying that she knows Young needs parking and both sides will work to iron out terms "as quickly as we can pull that together."

Town and Others Tried To Help

The rental fee is \$125 per month, or \$750 to the county over a six month period. Jones said revenue was a secondary consideration. "It's a response to a public need. That's what we're in the business of providing."

Long battle

Lousy Landlord

Young and P.H. Craig, who owns three parking lots adjacent to The Courtyard, have battled over terms of use since Young bought his property in 2005. During that time, Young has accused Craig and the town of conspiring against him, while physically threatening one tenant in a widely circulated e-mail and demanding the resignation of two town officials in a document on file at Chapel Hill Town Hall.

Craig maintains that Young has continued to charge tenants for parking without remitting rent to the owner of those spaces. "Out of respect to the tenants of The Courtyard, I have made several generous offers to rent parking spaces at considerably below the going rate for town parking," Craig said Friday. "Mr. Young's answer is that he has no intention of 'paying one red cent' to Craig for parking."

Young has not returned e-mails or phone messages from The Chapel Hill Herald in recent months.

Third-party mediation failed earlier this year. Craig has cut off Courtyard employees and customers from use of his lots as he seeks a modification in the 1979 Special Use Permit that binds his property to Young's building.

Lex Alexander, owner of 3 Cups coffee shop in The Courtyard, said the Orange County agreement does little for businesses like his, Sandwhich and LocoPops that close in the afternoon or early evening.

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

Alexander has been a vocal critic of Young, appealing to the Chapel Hill Town Council multiple times this year for help in solving the dispute. The 1979 SUP promised 79 parking spaces for The Courtyard; Alexander said that tenants, customers and employees now have use of 23 spaces.

"His plan provides valet parking for just a few of our weekly hours. This measure will help [restaurants] Bonne Soiree and Penang ... and we're happy for our neighbors if it does. It does nothing for us. ... We simply need our parking back the way it was when we signed our lease and invested in downtown Chapel Hill."

Jones said Orange County did not consult with the Town of Chapel Hill regarding past dealings with Young, which have included notices of violation related to the SUP that were issued to both him and Craig.

"The only thing we did was to check that there were no issues outstanding at this point," Jones said. "We tried to look at this as a public service initiative and the history on the other side is just that."

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