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parking

Note: Given the opportunity to report on something that would PERMANENTLY resolve the orchestrated and unlawful parking lot impasse -- this short ambiguous statement is all that was reported.

Town And Others Have Tried To Help

Chapel Hill parking may improve

Report has seven initiatives to help much-lamented conditions downtown
Author: DANIEL GOLDBERG dgoldberg@heraldsun.com; 918-1046

Article Text:

CHAPEL HILL -- More than a half dozen ongoing discussions related to parking have given at least one downtown leader reason to be optimistic.

"I think we're going to see some real parking shifts over the next six months," Liz Parham, executive director of the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership, told the group's board of directors at its most recent meeting.

Her monthly report included seven initiatives aimed at improving much-lamented parking conditions. The list included talks with The Courtyard owner Spencer Young that may lead to a new lot on Graham Street and a proposed change in the towing ordinance that faces a Town Council public hearing.

The latter was a particularly hot topic. Board members have long been concerned about the perception that Chapel Hill tow truck operators have itchy trigger fingers.

"I don't know if it's accurate, but we've heard from visitors that when they drive to downtown, they're almost put on the defensive because they don't see any 'Welcome to Chapel Hill' signs, they only see towing signs," said Laurie Paolicelli, executive director of the Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau.

Perhaps an improvement

While the amendments to the town ordinance suggested by staff -- a \$100 limit on towing fees and

guidelines for how a tow operator must respond to a vehicle owner who returns before the vehicle has been removed -- probably won't change the towing culture, they may cool some of the tensions, partnership officials said.

"Anyway, it's an improvement," Parham said. "We're going to let everyone downtown know about this so they go to the public hearing."

Board member Bronwyn Merritt recommended the addition of a penalty for tow operators who violate town ordinances. And Chris Jones was weary of the town staff recommendation that operators must accept all forms of payment, including checks and credit cards.

"I have a hard time asking a business, mandating that they take a check with all the fraud out there," Jones said.

The Chapel Hill Town Council will likely hold a public hearing on the towing ordinance next month.

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