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Topics:

Index Terms:

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Lousy Landlord

Parking dispute continues to embarrass

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It might almost be amusing if it wasn't so foolish and so harmful. But the dispute that has embroiled owner and tenants of The Courtyard shopping center in Chapel Hill has gone on for far too long. And it's continuing, embarrassing not only those involved but the town itself.

Town & Others Have Tried To Help

The quarrel -- like many in this community -- began over parking. Spencer Young, a former New York businessman, owns The Courtyard. P.H. Craig, a longtime Chapel Hill property owner, owns most of the parking attached to it. Despite mediation by the town, despite pleas to the Town Council, despite negotiations and ultimatums, letters and e-mails, construction tape and more, the two haven't come to an accommodation. Craig doesn't want to sell the parking spots to Young; Young doesn't want to pay Craig rent for the spots.

Feuds With Everyone

Then, this week, Young escalated the dispute. He posted notes in the windows of two of his Courtyard tenants, 3 Cups and the adjoining SandwHich, saying that the two businesses had failed to pay him more than \$85,000 in rent. The two business owners said they have been paying the rent into an escrow account for the last eight months, until Young provides the parking availability that he is contractually obligated to offer them.

Lousy Landlord

The two shops reopened Tuesday, but the petty battle wasn't over. Young informed all the tenants in the shopping center that, to deal with the parking issue, valet parking would be available to all their customers -- well, except for some. "The service will be exclusively offered for patrons of rent paying tenants of The Courtyard of Chapel Hill -- this means patrons of 3 Cups and SandwHich will NOT be eligible for this service," Young wrote.

The word "petty" doesn't do all of this justice. It is also small-minded and endlessly embarrassing.

Lousy Landlord

We'd like to think that the individuals involved could settle this between themselves, but -- at this far-gone point -- that seems incredibly unlikely. It may be outside of its purview, but the town needs to at least try and step in here before customers -- sick of the whole mess -- depart and businesses fail.

That's the last thing a struggling downtown Chapel Hill needs.

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