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Nearby land may ease parking woes

The owner of The Courtyard in Chapel Hill plans to purchase lots a block away

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CHAPEL HILL - Real estate investor Spencer Young thinks he has a solution for his downtown parking problem that has befuddled town leaders.

Next week, Young is scheduled to purchase two lots totaling about a quarter-acre on the west side of Graham Street near Franklin Street. What's there now is a gravel parking lot and a vacant one-story house used recently as offices.

Real estate agent Matt Robbins, who owns one of the lots, confirmed this week that the two parcels are under contract.

The News & Observer has tried to reach Young by telephone over the past several months without success.

In e-mail last month, however, Young told more than 50 people, including the mayor and town manager, that he plans to tear down the house and use the land for valet parking for The Courtyard restaurant and office complex a block away.

Young calls the plan a "win-win scenario" for a development he has called "Dysfunction Junction."

A New Yorker, Young moved to the Triangle and bought The Courtyard in 2005, after his oldest son, Michael, joined the Duke University lacrosse team. He lives in the Meadowmont subdivision.

A former Cornell University football player, Young also owns a strip mall in southeast Durham near the intersection of N.C. 54 and N.C. 55. His younger son, Kevin, is a freshman lacrosse player at Duke.

Once known for the restaurant Pyewacket, The Courtyard is now home to popular food vendors such as Locopops, 3Cups coffee, Sandwich, Bonne Soiree and Penang.

Its rear parking lot is also a magnet for locals and restaurant employees looking for free parking on Franklin Street. That sometimes makes it hard for The Courtyard's customers to find parking.

To make matters worse, in July neighbor P.H. Craig blocked off 56 parking spots he owns but that are tied to The Courtyard under a development permit that governs his and Young's properties. Young has been unable to negotiate a lease for the spaces.

The Courtyard has been operating with 23 on-site parking spaces, plus 35 on-street spots owned by the town a block away on Cameron Avenue. Orange County also recently made 60 spaces available for valet parking at the nearby Skills Development Center.

Recently, tenant Lex Alexander complained that valet parking will not help his 3Cups coffee

Lousy Landlord

shop, the Sandwhich shop or Locopops, which offer quick items rather than sit-down meals.

But Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership director Liz Parham said employees could park on Graham Street, leaving more space in The Courtyard lot open for customers.

"That's where I see the land being helpful," she said.

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