

Parking restrictions planned for Village Center lot

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Complaints about lack of spaces prompt change recommended by CDA

Village of Grafton officials are continuing to grapple with a downtown parking crunch — a problem that has sparked plans to restrict parking in a municipal lot next to the Grafton Village Center.

In response to complaints from business tenants in the center, the Community Development Authority last week recommended establishing a two-hour limit for the 59 parking spaces in the 13th Avenue lot.

The recommendation to the Public Safety Committee came after business owners said their customers are unable to find parking spaces in the lot during busy periods.

Kris Steeno, one of the owners of the Sweet Trio candy store in the center, told the CDA that signs currently restricting use of 15 spaces to patrons of five businesses that signed a parking lease with the village have been ineffective. Steeno, who was chosen by the other businesses to speak on their behalf, said the problem is most acute after 5 p.m. weekdays and on Saturdays.

Customers and employees of other businesses, including the Milwaukee Ale House on 13th Avenue, often use a large number of spaces in the lot, Steeno said.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the CDA has leased parking spaces to five of the seven businesses in the center — Sweet Trio, Alterra Coffee Roasters, VINO 100, Badger Optical and Grafton Ski & Cyclery — since 2008.

“The CDA’s hope has been to alleviate some of the parking problems associated with new development by providing restricted spaces,” he said.

Village Planner Mike Rambousek proposed continuing the lease agreement for 2010, with each business required to pay \$177, based on five equal shares of an \$888 cost to maintain the 15 parking spaces.

However, Steeno said her business and others cannot afford to pay any additional costs to enforce parking restrictions they believe are not working. She also said the lack of a safe pedestrian crossing has discouraged customers from using a

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municipal parking lot north of Washington Street (Highway 60) at 13th Avenue.

Due to ongoing parking problems, CDA member Ron LaPean, a village trustee, said he didn't believe tenants of the center should be charged for reserved spaces. His motion for a lease agreement that calls for each participating business to pay \$1 per year received unanimous approval from the CDA, whose recommendation was forwarded to the Village Board.

According to Hofland, village officials are continuing to explore ways to alleviate the downtown parking shortage. The CDA, he said, has followed a master parking plan that calls for the acquisition of additional land to increase off-street parking.

"At certain times of the day, customers of some downtown businesses are willing to park and walk. But some are not, and when they park for extended periods of time, it can create problems," Hofland said.

Last year, the village opened the 13th Avenue municipal lot north of Washington Street to provide 23 more parking spaces. Since then, officials have publicly said the lot has been underused because of the lack of a controlled pedestrian crossing through heavy traffic on Washington Street.

That safety concern should be alleviated this summer when 24-hour pedestrian-activated traffic signals are installed at the intersection, Hofland said.

The Public Safety Committee is expected at its next meeting to consider the recommendation to establish a two-hour parking restriction in the Grafton Village Center lot. The restriction would have to be made as an ordinance change that requires Village Board approval.

Hofland said that enforcing the new law would probably have to be done on a complaint basis.