

Battle lines drawn: Parking committee rejects all paid parking proposals

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — The advisory committee appointed to review plans to implement paid parking in downtown Saratoga Springs has shot down all the submitted proposals.

During a meeting Tuesday, the 11-member committee voted not to recommend any of the proposals before them.

"I was hoping they would give us input," committee chairman and city Finance Commissioner Ken Ivins Jr. said. "This is not the solution I was looking for."

Five proposals from companies in New York, Connecticut, Ohio and Tennessee were officially received by the city last week. The submissions varied in scope and size from one file folder to a nearly 200-page book.

At the start of the meeting, Ivins asked members to name and discuss their top two proposals.

"All the applications are totally flawed," said Harvey Fox, owner of n. Fox Jewelers on Broadway and representative of the Downtown Special Assessment District, as he made the motion to dismiss the proposals.

Fox was joined in opposition by Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce President Joe Dalton, Adirondack Trust Co. President and CEO Charles V. Wait, Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau Director Kathlyn Denkenberger, former Design Review Commission Chairman Patrick Kane, Downtown Special Assessment District representative Tim Mabee, City Center President Mark E. Baker and Assistant Chief of Police Michael Biss.

"What has happened here is that a solution has been assumed without public input," Wait said.

A main point of concern among those opposed was the recent realization that an agreement with Saratoga County

would prohibit revenue being collected from the parking structure at Woodlawn Avenue and Church Street from funding anything other than the maintenance of that structure.

"It's like lining up four poison pills on a table," Dalton said. "Input on a poison is no input at all."

Biss agreed with Dalton that choosing between the plans felt like "swallowing some poison."

"The request for proposals that was sent out wasn't clear," Mabee said.

The city expects to collect anywhere from \$400,000 to \$700,000 in revenue from parking tickets, but Mabee identified the means as a detriment to city tourism.

"That's not what Saratoga Springs is," he said.

The committee members crafted the language used in the request for proposals at their first meeting in January. According to Ivins, Dalton and Wait did not attend that meeting.

Wait and Deputy Mayor Shauna Sutton were appointed to the committee by Mayor Scott Johnson. Johnson has shown little support for the idea of paid parking downtown, but appeared to embrace the idea in his 2010 State of the City Address.

"If revenue is not generated to match that budgeted through paid parking, the city's deficit will increase and result in more spending cuts, with less services and potentially more layoffs before year's end," Johnson said in his address.

City resident Brian Riley was the only committee member willing to rank the proposals and the only one who voted against the proposal to reject them.

"I'd like to know how the business community is going to help us get out of this problem," Riley said.

Two public workshops to discuss paid parking are still scheduled for 6 p.m. March 6 at City Hall and 6:30 p.m. March 8 at the Canfield Casino. The City Council will have the final vote on awarding a bid for parking management.