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Saratoga Springs announces plans to build parking deck that would create 180 additional parking spaces downtown **(with video and renderings)**

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — “For far too long — decades, in fact — the issue of downtown parking has gone unresolved,” Mayor Scott Johnson said in the City Center Tuesday. “Well, today I am proud to announce a project that will directly solve, in large part, the parking shortage

in the center of our vibrant downtown.”

Johnson announced plans for a joint venture of public and private interests to build a “parking deck” over the city-owned parking lot on Woodlawn Avenue between Division and Church streets. Adding a second level to the parking lot one block from Broadway would create approximately 180 more parking spaces. The lot, which is in disrepair, currently has 147 spaces.

“We have to do work there anyway. It’s torn up,” Accounts Commissioner John Franck said.

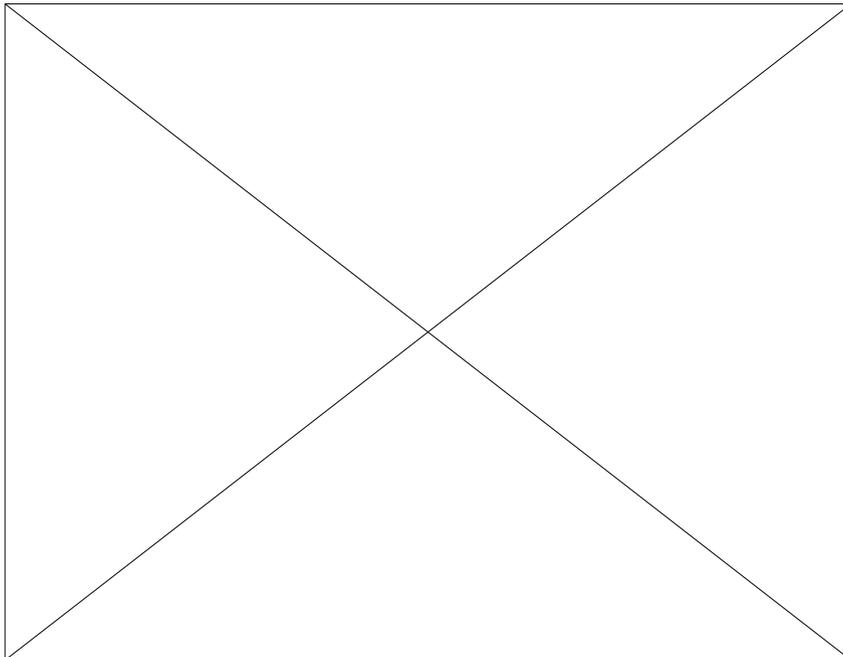
The commissioner said at least \$500,000 worth of work would need to be done on the lot regardless.

“We thought that would be wasted money and it wouldn’t get anything,” Franck said.

Johnson and Franck stood in a cluster of Saratoga Springs’ movers and shakers, including City Council members, supervisors, representatives of the Downtown Business Association, Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau and Saratoga Economic Development Corp., and numerous owners and presidents of Saratoga Springs businesses.

The plan is to have the parking deck ready in time for next year’s summer season.

“The parking will be consistent with what we already have in the city —namely free,” Johnson said. The lot would also exclude all-day parking, paving the way for “the turnover of spaces that best facilitates revenue production in downtown businesses as well as in the city coffers in terms of sales tax,” the mayor said.



According to Tuesday’s proposal, the project will be funded by both public and private dollars.

Approximately \$750,000 of the \$4.7 million project will come from a special assessment district of downtown businesses.

Another \$250,000 will come from a grant the city is working to get from “a source close to us that I cannot name at this time,” Johnson said. “I feel very confident that figure will come in,” he added.

At least \$850,000 will come from proceeds of city property sales, like the sale of the Lillian’s parking lot to Bonacio Construction, and the mayor said he hopes to add to that with future transactions.

There is also \$350,000 in the city’s parking reserve designated for parking improvements.

The rest of the project’s estimated cost, \$2.58 million, will be bonded by the city at a cost of about \$180,000 per year.

“We expect at least that much will be generated by the increase in sales tax,” Johnson said, citing estimates from various parking studies (“piles of them,” according to Johnson) that have been conducted over the years.

“Two words bring us here today: economic development,” he said.

Both Franck and Johnson said the cost estimates for the design, which is not finalized, are conservative.

“It is my belief that the \$2.5 or \$2.6 million we are talking about bonding will be reduced,” Franck said.

Johnson said he will be bringing the project before the Saratoga Springs City Council in the coming months and hopes to secure the money to start construction by early next year.

The two-story deck will be built with the potential to add a third story and approximately 180 more parking spaces. “It is more cost-effective to add another level (to the parking deck) than to build one from scratch,” Johnson said.

Franck has attempted to capitalize on the city’s need for parking in the past. In 2003, he proposed building a parking garage after researching studies that indicated a need for 800 to 1,100 additional parking spaces in the city.

“I think you are always going to be short of spaces,” Franck said. “But this will make a dent in what we need.”

When questioned about the need for parking spaces and how much they would actually increase revenues, Johnson said the need is there, and he often hears people say they would love to visit Saratoga Springs if it weren’t for the parking issue.

“Parking is an issue,” he said matter-of-factly. “Sometimes it’s a perception issue, but sometimes perception is reality.”