

Web posted Thursday, January 28, 1999

## Success puts squeeze on downtown parking

Planners trying to put in more spaces and teach the benefits of walking

By PAUL VAN KOLKEN  
Staff writer

Increased development of office and retail space is putting pressure on parking in downtown Holland. In response, planners are trying to squeeze in more spaces and teach people the benefits of walking.

"We must not lose sight of why people come downtown. They may have to walk a bit," said Patty Seiter, coordinator for the city's MainStreet/Downtown Development Authority.

With new office buildings sprouting downtown, Seiter and other officials are trying to figure out how to protect the landscaping and architecture that makes downtown Holland unique while still accommodating motorists.

"We are dealing with the pressures of success. We have to accommodate the vehicles that bring the people," Seiter said.

The last thing they want to do, Seiter said, is develop more parking lots, even though some residents think a need exists.

Jay Murphy, who moved into an apartment above the Peanut Store, 46 E. Eighth St., in August, received two tickets and had one of his cars impounded with a \$150 fine while trying to park his car downtown overnight.

"I think it would be incredible to have more parking," Murphy said. "I'd be willing to pay more."

Park Township resident Jill Smith said the parking isn't needed, but some days and times are worse than others.

"Some days they probably need it," Smith said, who usually drives downtown after 4 p.m.

City Planner Phil Meyer said it is cheaper to create more on-street parking spaces than spend \$6,000 per space to develop new parking lots.

"It's a lot easier to stripe the street than to pave a parking lot," Meyer said.

Downtown Holland's parking lots are free, financed by an assessment against downtown business owners. And with more than 1,200 parking spaces in lots and on the streets in the central business district, Seiter said there is sufficient parking.

Merchant Alan Martens, manager of Gazelle Sports, 24 W. Eighth St., said there is plenty of parking downtown.

"Parking is available, but if shoppers can't see their final destination, they feel it is a long way to walk," he said.

The new focus on parking, Meyer said, was sparked by the construction of a new office building under way at Seventh Street and Central Avenue, he planned GMB Architects building at Seventh and College Avenue, the proposed "Super Block" development between Seventh and Eighth streets from College to Columbia avenues and proposed Hope College expansion.

The parking lot north of Seventh between College and Columbia avenues will be extended to Sixth Street and reconfigured, he said, adding some parking spaces.

Meyer and Seiter submitted a report on a meeting of parking committees and the strategic planning committee of MainStreet/DDA to the City Council at a study session Tuesday.

The report suggested adding on-street parking along Seventh and Ninth streets.

City Manager Soren Wolff said he was opposed to that idea because of cars parked on the street would reduce the vision of motorists pulling in



and out of parking lots, resulting in accidents and slowed traffic.

Wolff also said the Michigan Department of Transportation still designates both streets as trunklines and will not allow parking.

Meyer said the city has created more on-street spaces on Eighth Street in front of the post office, and near 10th Street and Columbia Avenue by changing parking ordinances.

"We have to realize we are in a business district where parking is needed and on-street parking does create concerns for traffic and speed," he said.

With new construction under way and demand growing for additional parking, Meyer said some new businesses may want to provide off-street parking, even though city ordinances do not require downtown businesses to do so.

Merchants and other employee groups could do a better job of policing where employees park to allow space for shoppers., Martens said.

He added it may come to having employees pay for parking in designated locations where parking always would be available.

Meyer said public lots are a better way of providing parking spaces because business lots are generally not available for public uses when the business closes.

A parking structure may be too costly unless rental commitments or partnerships are obtained.

Martens says if a parking structure is a long-term goal, it may be cheaper to build now rather than later.

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## River Avenue plan in consultant's hands

A proposal for changing the designation of state highway business routes through the Holland area will be formalized by a Grand Rapids consulting firm under a contract approved Monday by the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council's policy committee.

Wade-Trim will pull together earlier suggestions and plans for River Avenue redevelopment in Holland and Holland Township. The report will cost \$3,500.

Part of the proposal calls for eliminating the designation of Seventh and Ninth streets as

Business Route I-196 and Business Route U.S. 31, and turning control from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) back to the city of Holland. Under the proposal, River would be made a state-controlled highway business route as far north as Lakewood Boulevard, which would become a business route east to U.S. 31.

The River Avenue study covers an area extending from 32nd Street in Holland north to 136th Avenue in Holland Township, said Sue Higgins, executive director of the MACC. Initially the River study began at Ninth, but Higgins said with

revisions to other business routes, it became imperative the study extend to 32nd.

"The current business routes do not reflect the growth of the area," Higgins said. "We are looking to reconfigure the business routes."

Should Seventh and Ninth streets revert to local control, parking could be added along the streets as advocated by some Holland council members. It also would permit installation of directional signs already designed for Holland's downtown district that cannot be installed because of MDOT restrictions.

Web posted Thursday, January 15, 2004

## Parking plans target Seventh Street

More spaces ahead as city reaches an agreement with state about business route

By LESA INGRAHAM  
Staff writer

How many times have you driven around the block looking for a place to park in downtown Holland?

City officials want to put an end to that, giving shoppers a place to leave their vehicle while they enjoy the downtown area.

Some of the ideas to increase parking include 65 proposed spaces along Seventh Street. Adding the spaces along Seventh would be timely, said City Manager Soren Wolff.

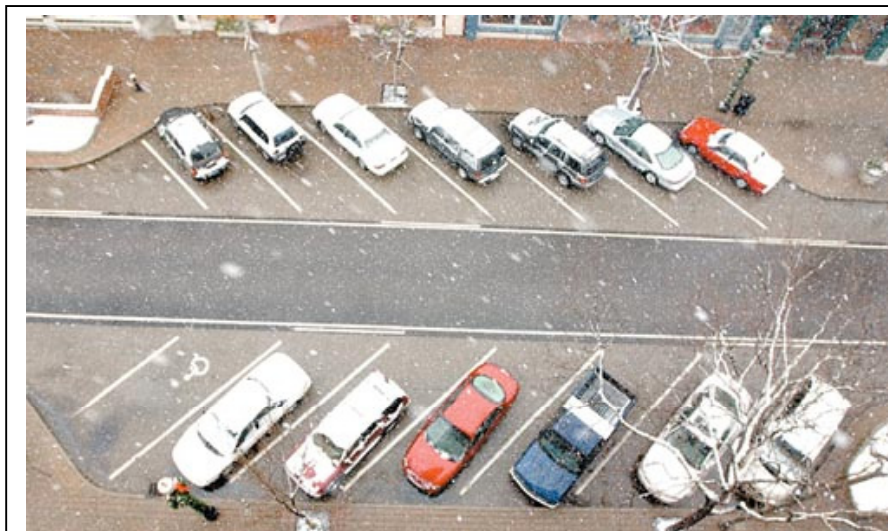
On Tuesday, the city reached a tentative agreement with the Michigan Department of Transportation to have the rights of Seventh Street returned to the city. The street is now part of Business Route U.S. 31 under MDOT's control.

Adding parking to Seventh Street is just one of several in a report presented to the Holland City Council Wednesday night. The report was compiled by the city's "turbo parking group," a group of city staffers.

Assistant City Manager Greg Robinson said the group has been evaluating the more than 3,600 public and private spaces in the 27-block downtown area since 2001. In that time, many things already have been implemented.

"This hasn't been about when we were going to get the report out, because we have been working along the way to get things into place," Robinson said.

Parking that has been created as a result of the study includes 10 diagonal spaces on Eighth Street east of College Avenue and 330 new spaces under construction in the parking lot north of the Civic Center.



*FULL PARKING: The Holland City Council discussed ways to add more parking spots to the downtown area on Eighth Street, above. A parking group calls the Eighth Street spots the "gold zone."  
Sentinel/ Dennis R.J. Geppert*

Phil Meyer, the city's planning and development manager, said there are things that can be done to make existing parking more available.

"There is an area that we refer to as the 'gold zone,' and that is those spaces on Eighth Street and in the parking lots just behind the businesses," Meyer said. He added that in some situations, employees are parking in the "gold zone," taking the access away from potential customers.

"It is something like \$30,000 a year that businesses lose when employees are sitting there all day long," Meyer said.

In addition to opening the spaces up to customers, Meyer said it also is important to promote the ease of walking downtown.

"There's plenty of parking downtown. We just need to convey to people that the space doesn't need to be directly outside of where they are going. We have created a walkable environmental downtown," Meyer said.

While there may be more parking spaces, don't expect to see a parking garage anytime soon. Meyer said with free parking downtown now, he doesn't think people will pay to park in a parking garage.

Web posted Thursday, July 29, 2004

## State roads will soon return to city

By LESA INGRAHAM  
Staff writer

Holland wants control over some its major roads.

After two years of work with the Michigan Department of Transportation, 3.37 miles of state highway areas will soon be turned back to the city.

But it won't be free. An estimated \$100,000 is needed to maintain the roads once they are no longer part of the state highway system. Also, an estimated \$30,000 a year will be needed for

maintenance on the traffic signals, said city engineer Mike TenBrock.

The roads that now will be under city control are Michigan Avenue from 19th Street to 32nd Street, River Avenue from Ninth Street to 19th street, Seventh Street from Pine to Columbia, Ninth Street from Pine to Columbia, Pine Avenue from Ninth Street to Seventh Street, Columbia Avenue from Ninth Street to Seventh Street and Eighth Street from Columbia to Fairbanks.

Mayor Pro-tem Craig Rich said that the roads are not in good condition, nor are they compatible with pedestrian traffic, specifically Seventh and Ninth streets.

Assistant City Manager Greg Robinson said he expects the issue to be before the Holland City Council at its Aug. 4 meeting.

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## Council hopes local control will improve streets

By LESA INGRAHAM  
Staff writer

By taking 3.37 miles of streets back into the city's road system from the state, some members of the Holland City Council are hoping the result will be 125 new parking spaces, better roads and slower traffic.

On Wednesday night, the Holland City Council voted to take back:

- Michigan Avenue from 19th Street to 32nd Street
- River Avenue from Ninth to 19th streets
- Seventh Street from Pine to Columbia
- Ninth Street from Pine to Columbia
- Pine Avenue from Ninth Street to Seventh
- Columbia Avenue from Ninth Street to Seventh
- Eighth Street from Columbia to Fairbanks.

"The turn back also gives us an opportunity to talk solely here at home, how the reality of the turn back can provide to us, where we feel it's appropriate and necessary, for additional on-street parking downtown," said Mayor Al McGeehan.

McGeehan said additional parking could come from closing a lane on either Seventh or Ninth streets.

"We don't need three lanes with the volume of traffic we have today, and we don't need the speed generated by three lanes," McGeehan said. "We could potentially do this (parking spaces) with a can of white paint and a 6-inch roller."

An estimated \$160,000 to \$165,000 will need to be factored into the city's budget for maintenance on the roads. It's the additional

cost that caused city Councilman Mike Trethewey to vote against accepting the turn back.

"This is just 'X' number of more miles we need to work into our plan," Trethewey said. "I can see the reasoning, but I don't think the costs, to me, are justified."

But the majority of the city council is looking forward to upgrading and changing the roads they desire, something that wasn't easily done when the roads were under the control of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

"We have a community sense of how we want the area to look here, and I don't think the state cares how the roads look," said Councilman Jerome Kobes.

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## Bridge isn't only road work ahead

### City hires firm to handle work on Pine, Michigan, River in 2005

By ROEL GARCIA and LESA INGRAHAM  
Staff writers

If you thought having Pine Avenue closed from Seventh to Ninth Street for three weeks this summer was a hassle, just wait 'til next year.

Along with the more publicized project to replace the River Avenue bridge, reconstruction work is also scheduled next year for 28 blocks of the River-Pine-Michigan avenues corridor from the bridge to 28th Street. Having the bridge out for months and rebuilding parts of the city's three main north-south roadways isn't going to be easy, but it's best to get it out of the way, said Holland City Manager Soren Wolff.

"We should squeeze it (road work) all into one season to get the misery all done at one time," Wolff said at Wednesday night's Holland City Council meeting.

Engineering work on the almost \$6 million reconstruction project is expected to start this fall. URS Corp. was awarded a \$530,000 contract Wednesday by the council for the engineering work. URS handled engineering for the reconstruction of Grand Rapids' U.S. 131 "S" curve.

Work on Pine, River and Michigan avenues is expected to be done in shifts, said Tina Perry, engineering assistant with the city. Which side the work would start on, how long the phases will last and how drivers will be impacted isn't yet known, Perry said.

"The plans are not solid on this yet," Perry said. She added that the work will likely limit traffic down to one lane in each direction.

Kathi Bouman, director of the Grace Christian Child Care Center at 555 Michigan Ave., said she isn't looking forward to the reconstruction.

"Speaking personally, I've already been rear-ended once on that road and bringing it down to one lane isn't going to make it any better," Bouman said. She said that between 25 to 30 parents drop their children off daily at the center, needing to be able to get in and out. While people will still have access off Cherry Street, Bouman said the roadwork may impact the number of children cared for at the center.

"We have a lot of parents coming from Hope (College) and it may have an impact if it's harder for them to get down to us," Bouman said.

But, roadwork is part of progress. Holland hasn't been able to upgrade the streets itself because most of the affected blocks have been part of Business Route I-196 and thus under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

The city took back control of those roadways earlier this month. With the return came a \$3.5 million check for improvements, which Wolff said will be used in this project.

Mayor Al McGeehan said work on the corridor is the next logical step for the area south of the bridge.

"It's the next necessary step as we look towards the River Avenue Bridge project," McGeehan said.

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