



A new building for this corner? That's what the Farmington council will have to decide in the months ahead

Disgruntled

Merchants want more downtown parking

By CORINNE ABATT

If and when a team of planning consultants checks with business people intimately involved with a facelift for the northeast corner of Farmington and Grand River, they will smack heading into a problem—parking.

Farmington council members enthusiastically endorsed such a study by Howard Green and Associates, agreeing to the \$6,350 cost from a federal community development grant. While the study will focus on the northeast corner, other downtown areas will receive consideration as well.

City officials say they have been considering doing something about the downtown's problems for about nine months.

Andrew Konjarevich, owner of the building at the corner which houses his shoe repair business, a beauty parlor and barbershop, says such talk has been going on for years.

Robert Marshick, who has owned the Korner Barber Shop in building space he leases from Konjarevich for the past 13 years agrees an updating of the downtown area has come up for sale. The city should have had the foresight then to buy them like the city of Northville did.

"They've always talked about doing something with this side of the street," Marshick said.

LABELING PARKING as the big problem, he said. "Where do you put the parking? That's the only problem. The no-parking on Grand River from 34 to 40 m. has helped the flow of traffic, but that's our busiest time and for the downtown area, parking is really important."

That's the terrific advantage which the shopping centers have over us. While our regular customers still come to us, new customers will try someplace else that's more convenient first.

Marshick says he would be willing to pay more rent if the building was redone and there was more and better parking.

About the possible improvements he said, "I think it sounds terrific."

Building owner Konjarevich was more skeptical. "I think the city has waited too long. All the big retail stores are now on the outskirts of the city. J.L. Hudson will soon be not too many miles away."

Speaking about the proposed rejuvenation he said, "It should have been done 10 to 15 years ago when many of those Oakland Street houses came up for sale. The city should have had the foresight then to buy them like the city of Northville did."

He continued, "I grant you this side of town should be rejuvenated,

but it would cost \$250,000 to put up a new building. Who will be able to afford the rent with no parking? This is the reason there has never been anything on this corner. Parking has always been a problem."

He thought for a moment about the prospect of a new building. "I'm busy. The beauty shop is doing well. The barber shop is the largest in town. If there was a new building here, you wouldn't find a shoe repair, a beauty shop and a barbershop in it."

Parking is the bugaboo in the business life of Old Village Inn proprietor, John Cowley. His patrons generally look for parking space along the alley that runs behind the northeast corner buildings.

Standing in the crowded parking area, he said, "They come through here and if there are no parking spaces, they go right on. Look at that car of four, they can't find a place to park so they're going somewhere else."

"I've been here four years. At the beginning we had ample parking. The Secretary of State and the real estate office have taken up quite a bit since they moved in."

He looked across the alley at the Heeny-Sundquist Funeral Home parking lot.

"For a while the funeral parlor let us use their parking lot at night, but the kids dumped so many bottles and cans there, they closed it. And I don't blame them."

HE QUESTIONED WHETHER he would consider either closing or moving his business, if things got worse.

"Liquor licenses come high in this town, but what good is a license if nobody can park?"

After having tried to make the front of his building more attractive, he gave up.

"I kept putting in shrubs, but the kids going to the movie pulled them out."

While Cowley stood there bemoaning the parking situation, Walter Sundquist of the funeral home, came over to commiserate.

"The city fathers have been sitting on their haunches too long," he said. "We definitely do need parking and it's a matter of convincing those houses," he added, motioning toward Oakland St.

Saying that for a while he had opened his parking lot evenings to neighboring businesses, he commented, "But, I quit because the kids left it in such a mess."

He described how people took advantage of his generosity and used it during the day when he needed the space for funeral parking. He recalls when a couple used his lot as a lover's lane in daylight and refused to move when asked although there were mourners waiting for the space.

The results and recommendations of the study are due to be presented to the council about the middle of November.

The study group will find themselves caught between two factions and two sets of attitudes if they consider moving Oakland St. houses to make way for the needed parking. Oakland is a tree-lined street of pleasant typically Farmington homes. Several are probably eligible for membership in the proposed historic district. One already has an historic plaque on the front. Another with Mansard characteristics was moved to the Oakland site from Grand River.

The building where the barbershop is located is one of the oldest in the city. Preservationists may object vehemently to changes which would further erode the historical significance of the downtown area. The progressives counter that without change, the downtown will not survive or ever gain even a portion of the business that has been lost to the shopping centers with their hundreds of parking spaces ready and waiting.



Korner Barbershop owner Robert Marshick favors building improvements if they include more parking



Old Village Inn proprietor John Cowley says more parking spaces are the key to improving his business.



His shoe repair business would probably go if a brand new building replaced the one Andrew Konjarevich owns on the corner of Farmington and Grand River. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)



Walter Sundquist thinks the Oakland St. homes ought to be razed for more parking.

Staff photos by Harry Mauthe