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Hinsdale parking studied

Agency surveying residents, business owners



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By **Annemarie Mannion**, Chicago Tribune reporter

March 19, 2013

Hinsdale and Elmhurst rely on their downtown districts to keep the communities vital, provide amenities and resources for residents and generate sales taxes. But both are wrestling with what seems like a never-ending issue: parking.

It's no secret that the village of Hinsdale has struggled with ways to provide parking downtown. Now it's getting some help in trying to achieve the goal of providing parking for shoppers, business owners, employees and residents while maintaining the area's historic charm. The goal is not necessarily to build structures but to better use the parking that's already there.

As a result of a grant application by the village, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP, has embarked on an independent study of parking practices in the village's central business district. The agency is conducting an online survey to learn about what residents, business owners and others think about parking.

The village applied in October for the help and was awarded a technical assistance grant.

MAPS

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Knowing what's available is the first step to finding a solution, said Lindsay Bayley, project manager for CMAP.

"It's easy to say everybody's looking for parking, but it's really important to evaluate your demand and supply before you (go to such a solution) as building structure, because those can be expensive," she said.

A parking garage costs about \$30,000 per space, she added.

Besides being expensive, parking garages can be controversial. Elmhurst is considering a six-story, 78-foot-tall parking garage to be built on Addison Street in the central business district. The proposal was strongly opposed recently by a line of speakers who spent 3 1/2 hours telling Zoning and Planning Commission members why they should reject the project.

The developer, ARCO Murray/Addison Corridor LLC, asked last week that continued discussion of its request to build the structure at 135-149 N. Addison St., originally

scheduled for March 14, be delayed to April 11. The Elmhurst development would have retail and office space as well as parking.

"In order to appropriately address the concerns conveyed during the Zoning and Planning Commission meeting on Feb. 28, 2013, we request a continuance until April 11, 2013," Bradley Dannegger of ARCO Murray National Construction Co. said in a letter to Planning and Zoning administrator Than Werner.

Elmhurst has parking decks on First, Schiller and Adelaide streets.

While consideration of a parking garage is delayed in Elmhurst, CMAP has been doing parking counts throughout downtown Hinsdale. It's the first step to resolving parking issues, Bayley said.

"We're first looking at understanding what's happening in the community," she said. "We're doing parking counts and interviewing stakeholders."

CMAP also has developed an online survey about parking that has just two questions and is available for anyone to complete. It asks respondents to name priorities for parking, such as more available spaces, closer spaces, lower costs and less traffic congestion. It also asks what potential solutions respondents might favor from such options as demand-based pricing to increasing enforcement and fines to building a parking garage.

"Everybody has a different idea on what the problem is and how to solve it," Bayley said. "To some degree, they're all right."

Bayley said CMAP would consider a wide range of potential solutions, including whether parking is not being used.

"We've seen some streets just outside the downtown core that are underutilized," she said. "A solution might be to remove time limits."

Another idea suggested by a resident was to provide a drop-off area for Metra commuters, she said.

Whatever solutions are proposed, Bayley said, the focus will be on maintaining the downtown's vitality.

"Whatever we do, we want to do it with the customers or visitors as the priority," she said.

Tim Scott, economic development director in Hinsdale, said the village wants to better manage its existing supply of parking.

Bayley said Hinsdale was selected for the technical assistance grant because it provided an opportunity to study the problem in an overall way.

"This is a topic very few communities have addressed comprehensively," she said.