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The Laconia Daily Sun

Belmont selectmen approve parking plan with some 1-hour spots

By Roger Amsden
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BELMONT — Selectmen last night approved a new downtown parking ordinance designed to add more spaces for customers of businesses in the village area while limiting parking to one hour for some designated areas on Main Street.

The plan adds more than 40 spaces to the 28 currently available to the public according to Police Chief Vincent Baiocchetti, who developed the ordinance in cooperation with other town officials after merchants in the downtown area had brought their concerns over parking problems to Jon Pike, chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

The changes were outlined at a public hearing preceding the unanimous vote by selectmen to adopt the ordinance.

Pike said that one thing which had moved him in the direction of having the town look at parking problems in the village area was the sight of an unregistered vehicle with a "for sale" sign on it sitting in the same place on Main Street for a couple of months.

"We're building a park just down the street. We're putting in flower boxes to make it as nice as we can. I think we have to make it more friendly for businesses so people will want to come here," said Pike, noting that a Memorial Day ceremony and a vintage car show held last Saturday had brought a large number of people to the Main Street area.

Pete LaPointe, who runs a barber shop on Main Street said that he has been having a problem with people parking in front of his business for five hours or more and welcomed the change.

"People think because there's a car parked there that I'm busy, so they don't come in. It's costing me business," said LaPointe.

The changes establish seven one-hour parking spaces, one of them designated for handicapped parking in front of the town hall on Main Street. They also designate seven spaces in the Main Street municipal parking lot next to the town library one-hour spaces, leaving the other nine unrestricted.

And four spaces on Fuller Street across from town hall will also be designated as one-hour parking from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The 10 spaces in the Nelson Court municipal parking lot will be designated for town employees or town use parking 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Friday while the Fuller Street lot will have six designated for town employee or town use parking from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Baiocchetti said that one of the main thrust of the changes is to move the parking for the 13 town employees to areas which will not conflict with business parking, opening up additional spaces for businesses.

Susan Woodbury, who has run the Village Image Salon at the corner of Main Street and Rte. 140 for 11 years and has six employees who park in the downtown area was critical of the process by which the changes were proposed.

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"We run a business down here and bring people in to the downtown area from all over. But I didn't find out about the changes until I read about them in the newspaper. Why couldn't the chief have come to me and talked about them? It's just common courtesy" she said.

She was also critical of the fact that copies of the proposed ordinance hadn't been made available to the public at the meeting, saying that it made it difficult for them to understand the proposed changes, leading town officials to have copies of them made and distributed.

When she was critical of what she said was an increase in parking for town employees at the expense of businesses, Selectman David Morse defended the changes as being "as business friendly as possible."

Before the vote Pike said that the plan makes a lot more spaces available and isn't cast in stone.

"If it doesn't work, we'll modify it," he said.

Later in the meeting, nearly an hour after the vote was cast, Woodbury said that after she had read the ordinance she would like some clarification on the fine structure and enforcement.

A brief discussion took place but Chairman Pike cut it short by saying that the ordinance had already passed and any further discussion would have to take place at a subsequent meeting.

Selectmen also adopted an ordinance governing the use of stickers at the town beach which would allow those who show up without a sticker a one day pass but would require a sticker, which can be obtained at town hall, for future visits.

And they agreed to support a vote by the Winnepesaukee River Basin Program Advisory Board to proceed with a \$4.8-million upgrade which would replace the present chlorine disinfection treatment system with one using ultraviolet light.

"I'm no engineer but anytime you don't have to add chlorine to the water it seems to me that it's good for the environment," said Selectman Ronald Cormier, who moved to support the project, which carries a \$498,000 price tag over an eight-year period for Belmont.