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Parking in the Whit

WCC STEPS UP TO SOLVE PROBLEMS by Shannon Finnell

During the Whiteaker Block Party, parking is usually a pain, with drivers scouring residential streets for a spot, sometimes giving up and parking illegally. This year, the Whiteaker Community Council is trying to alleviate the problem by opening up at least two gravel lots in the neighborhood for \$5 per car. The WCC will use its share of the funds for a big long-term goal: a public parking lot in the Whit.

“Hopefully that will relieve the serious parking issues that we have during Block Party, when 1,000-plus cars come down here and start parking in front of driveways and all that,” says Sam Hahn, WCC chairman and co-owner of Blairally Vintage Arcade.

The main parking lot, which can fit more than 200 vehicles, is at N. Polk and Grand. Hahn says partygoers can find parking simply by following WCC’s signs. Half the money raised will go to the WCC and half to the Block Party.

“Obviously it’s a huge issue for the Whiteaker Block Party, but every single weekend parking is a big problem,” Hahn says. “When we have one of those weeks when my arcade has a show, and Sam Bond’s has a show and Tiny’s has a show, all of a sudden there’s a bunch of people down here.”

Hahn explains that while the issue has gotten worse during the past five years as businesses open and thrive, a parking shortage was already noticeable back when Papa’s Soul Food moved to the Whit in 2006.

“Most of Blair between 3rd and 5th avenues is in what’s called the Whiteaker Historic District Parking Exempt Zone,” Hahn says. “None of the businesses there on Blair are required to have any parking, so it kept filling up with more and more businesses, which brought more and more customers and employees and such, and nobody had to build a parking lot.”

A couple of long-term sites have caught WCC members’ attention, but Hahn says they’re not ready to discuss specifics. In addition to the purchase price, parking lot development will be a major cost. “There are at least a half a dozen gravel lots in the Whiteaker that are just sitting around doing nothing,” he says, “and we can’t park on them because they don’t meet parking code, which means that it has to be dug down 6 feet, stormwater put in and all these crazy requirements.”

Hahn says that while city code is the source of the parking problem, it wasn’t intentional, and the WCC has been working with the city toward a solution, including alternatives such as a long-term lease. “One deal that they’ve offered is that if there are property owners who are willing to have their lots be used as a public parking lot, the city is willing to give a full or partial property tax exemption for that property,” he says.

A fix with the city might allow the WCC to use its funds for site development. “It costs roughly \$12,000 to \$15,000 per parking space, and we need 50-plus parking spaces,” Hahn says. “It’s a lot of money.”

Sarah Medary, the city of Eugene’s executive director of Planning and Development, says, “We are continuing to work with neighbors and businesses to find creative solutions that increase mobility options in the Whiteaker area.”

In addition to motor vehicle parking, St. John Maximovitch Serbian Orthodox Church will host a free bike valet at 3rd and Blair. ■

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