

Long-Awaited Parking Plaza Opens Downtown

by K_Guice

It has been a long time coming, but the City of Bend's parking garage, in the heart of downtown, will officially open June 1st.

Centennial Parking Plaza, named through a citizen contest, will provide 550 additional parking spaces. According to a city announcement, the garage will "help make the downtown experience positive for everyone - residents, downtown employees and visitors."

The five-level structure is located along Lava Road between Oregon and Minnesota Avenues. The garage's main entrance is off of Lava, with a secondary entrance off of Tin Pan Alley.

The \$9.7 million dollar project took 14 months to complete and will provide two and three hour time-limited public parking spaces. City officials report it is already generating added benefits.

"The parking structure has already caused a lot of new development downtown," said John Russell, city economic development director. "There is a lot of new investments and more to come and I think it has a lot to do to with that structure," he added.

The garage will serve downtown's shops, restaurants and entertainment spots. Business owners, like John Voelzow, the proprietor of Pave Fine Jewelry, are pleased. "It will be beneficial," he said.

However, everyone is not so enthusiastic, including one of Voelzow's employees. "Many of the people who work down here can't afford the additional \$45 per month," said Rod Kuehnast. "It should be discounted to the people who work downtown."

"We don't agree with that," Russell stated. "You have to pay to park." He says the taxpayers of the city of Bend paid for this structure; it needs to operate in the black and not be subsidizing downtown workers to park in it.

Charlotte Labots-Misbeek, who is eight months pregnant and works downtown, has mixed feelings. While she thinks adding parking is a good idea, as a mother with a fourth child on the way spending an additional \$45 month isn't possible.

"It's hard being pregnant and having to go move my car every few hours and getting tickets from time to time," she said. "But I just won't part with the money."

The opening will trigger the closing of permit parking on Greenwood Avenue and Wall Street; Irving Street between Harriman and Hawthorne avenues; Hospital Hill; and the Mirror Pond lot.

Unlike many dark parking garages, this parking structure has a more open, airy feel with lower walls on each level that allows for more natural light. The top floors feature panoramic views.

Adding to the open feel are two glass elevators. In addition, there are two stairwells allowing access the garage. On the bottom floor, parking patrons will find three van-accessible parking spaces with two additional spaces on each floor located next to the elevators.

The maximum clearance for vehicles heading to the upper floors is posted at 7 feet, 8 inches.

A limited number of monthly parking permits are available for \$45 per month. For more information call Diamond Parking at 317-2805.

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