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# Second forum on downtown parking in Amherst scheduled for January

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AMHERST — After an initial forum indicating that several business owners and residents are concerned about insufficient public parking downtown and new mixed-use projects that could further limit the supply of spaces, town officials are moving forward with plans to address these issues.

Senior Planner Jeffrey Bagg told the Select Board on Monday that at a second public forum on parking, scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Jan. 20, officials will begin coming up with short- and long-term suggestions and asking for public reaction on those strategies. The meeting will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Society on North Pleasant Street.

Bagg said a focus will be on identifying new areas for parking and how to better use what already exists. “We definitely envision the second forum further exploring these issues,” Bagg said.

At the Sept. 23 forum, suggestions were made about possibly expanding the existing Boltwood parking garage or building a new garage in another location. There was also concern about the pressure from the Kendrick Place and One East Pleasant projects that are adding more than 120 dwelling units, but only about 40 parking spaces.

Other comments centered on parking rates and permit parking, downtown signs and whether there are better ways to regulate parking in private lots.

Bagg said there may be funding through the state’s Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to create a parking demand management plan. This would help the town review how its parking system works, Bagg said.

“This is really a great opportunity and timing for us, where we’ve started the parking forum process,” Bagg said.

Select Board member Connie Kruger said she appreciates that another forum will move the town a step closer to solving parking issues, which is critical to progress and future development downtown.

Select Board member Alisa Brewer said Town Manager John Musante and the Planning Department should get a definitive answer about whether the garage, which opened in 2002, could be expanded. Brewer said several people referred to it having been constructed to support the addition of another deck.

Meanwhile, Musante said the town has signed an agreement with the state to receive a \$1.5 million MassWorks grant that will bury overhead utility wires on East Pleasant, Triangle and Pray streets.

Department of Public Works Superintendent Guilford Mooring will oversee this work and coordinate a schedule with Western Massachusetts Electric Co., Verizon and Comcast in 2015.

“You can expect that project to be complete before the Kendrick Place project opens for occupancy at the end of August next year,” Musante said.

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