

Council considers repealing parking impact fee

By **Charles McMahon**

cmcmahon@seacoastonline.com

May 24, 2012 9:23 AM

PORTSMOUTH — The City Council voted this week to move forward with an effort to eliminate downtown parking requirements for non-residential uses and to repeal a controversial parking impact fee.

Councilors were unanimous in their decision to bring back the proposal for first reading at the June 11 meeting at City Hall.

Since it was enacted nearly 15 years ago, the impact fee has brought in more than \$800,000 in revenue for the city. The revenues have been used by the city for a variety of public parking and transit enhancements, such as the lease cost for the Masonic Lot, new meters and the addition to the High Hanover parking garage.

Despite its added revenue to the city, the impact fee has been cited by many business owners as being a major obstacle in locating in the downtown.

Elimination of the requirements and impact fee is being proposed through an amendment to the city's zoning ordinance relative to off-street parking standards in the downtown overlay district. The amendment requires three votes of the council and a public hearing.

As proposed, the amendment would eliminate off-street parking requirements for all non-residential uses, change the residential parking requirements to 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling unit and eliminate the option to make a payment in lieu of providing required off-street parking.

The Planning Board voted unanimously in April to recommend the zoning amendment.

The Board of Adjustment has also agreed with the amendment and over the last few months, has granted variances to businesses looking to have the requirements and impact fee waived.

Despite the concerns, the council voted to move forward with a first reading in June.

As currently written, restaurants must provide one space per 100 square feet. Upper-floor uses, residential or non-residential, require one space per 1,000 square feet. Other ground floor uses, such as retail or office space, has no parking requirements.

If a business owner or developer wants to get out of having to provide the parking, they are allowed to pay their way out of the requirement by dishing out \$2,200 per space.

In discussing the amendment Monday night, councilors appeared in agreement with the recommendations.

City Manager John Bohenko said the amendment falls in line with the city's overall effort to make changes to the parking standards through a Parking Omnibus. Bohenko said a work session on the omnibus is slated for June 18.

Councilor Esther Kennedy said she was concerned about holding the first vote on the amendment prior to the work session.

"I won't vote for this on first reading without having that discussion first," she said.

Councilor Brad Lown said he agreed with having the work session prior to the first vote.