Moab City Council Agenda Item  
Meeting Date: February 11, 2020

Title: Resolution 2020-xx to immediately suspend the Downtown Parking Structure project, including on-going design work, pending study of alternative uses of UDOT transportation funds.

Date Submitted: February 5, 2020  
Presenter: Mike Duncan, City Council member  
Options: Approve, deny, or modify.

Recommended Motion: I move to approve Resolution 2020-xx to immediately suspend the Downtown Parking Structure project, including on-going design work, pending study of alternative uses of UDOT transportation funds.

Summary: There is no clear need for a West side Downtown Parking Structure as well as liabilities. Further, there are optional approaches that better satisfy Moab’s transportation needs and make better use of UDOT HotSpot funds.

Background: A pair of Downtown Parking Structures, one on the east and one on the west side of Main Street, was one of several projects proposed in a 2017 UDOT Region 4 Arches Hotspot Study:

https://uplan.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=3e4e78bee14e4030aabe0a5a70ffe94f

Parking structures were ranked third in priority after 1) a bypass and 2) Main Street Improvements. Parking structures were touted at that time to reduce congestion, increase economic opportunities and increase recreation tourism opportunity. Subsequently in 2018 $10M in funding was allocated. Small portions of that funding were used to conduct a Conceptual Preliminary Bypass study and a Downtown Parking Study.

While a bypass enjoyed considerable popular support, since that time it has encountered strong opposition by residents near proposed corridors. Making its impacts acceptable is believed to be financially prohibitively. Subsequently the idea has gone dormant.

The Downtown Parking Study focused on new medians for safety reasons. This necessitated removing on-street parking. If implemented, there indeed would be a need for on-street parking replacement. However, the idea encountered strong opposition from merchants and has since gone dormant. However, the requirement for new parking structures is now much less obvious.
This study also found that the West side city-owned surface lot which was planned to house the West side Downtown Parking Structure is not running at capacity. It further found that visitors tend to walk not further than 600 feet from where they park, although it is possible that visitors who are merely enjoying a stroll around town rather than shopping for specific items may well venture further. Thus, businesses in the near vicinity of new DPS’s may well rejoice, but those further south may cry foul.

The remaining $8.5M of funding is not adequate to build both east and west side parking structures, so that the East structure is not presently under consideration. However, implementation of the West side DPS is underway, currently about $200K into its contracted detailed design phase.

Notably, things have changed in the past year. Moab’s enthusiasm for new “increase(d) economic opportunities and increase(d) recreation tourism opportunity” has waned as evidenced by a moratorium on new Overnight Accommodations and subsequent removal of OA uses in commercial zones, with plans to reinstate them only under standards and locations more acceptable to the city. Residents and visitors constantly re-iterate that they love Moab’s rural, rustic feel. A big-city multi-story concrete monolith parking garage, while perfectly sensible in a big, non-resort city, makes little sense in Moab, the little town that really wants to stay little.

More importantly, design of the (West) DPS has changed due to cost constraints. Unfortunately, it makes the structure more objectionable. Originally conceived as one story underground and two above, for cost reasons it has morphed into none below and four stories above ground. Its height is 42 feet (not counting the additional height of cars parking on the top story), even though the maximum height allowed in its C-3 zone is 40 feet. It will block the viewshed both looking to the north and south, to the disappointment of visitors who constantly admire Moab’s rims. No other buildings in C-3, for example the Hoodoo hotel nearby, are taller than two stories.

Presently, DPS design does not accommodate over-sized vehicles, either overly-long (for example trailers) or overly-tall (for example RV’s). This does nothing to alleviate Moab’s chronic problem of providing parking for oversize vehicles, which otherwise often park on residential streets.

Cost considerations are not yet well addressed. We’ve already seen unexpected anticipated construction cost force redesign. Potential overruns are common. Maintenance will be required, but unless DPS is metered, there is no revenue. Even if free, DPS will be the parking destination of last resort, since motorists dislike the extra complication of threading congested off-Main Street access streets, as well as navigating ingress/egress into a multi-story structure. If DPS is metered, there is an additional incentive not to use it when all remaining parking in town is free.
Since the current surface lot on which DPS is to sit is under-utilized, it is not clear if DPS will break even or turn a profit even if metered.

Thus, it seems prudent to re-evaluate the wisdom of building a huge (by Moab standards) concrete monolith to provide off-street parking for which there is no clear need. We suggest suspending DPS design work while alternatives are explored. Those alternatives include expanding other surface lots. It is possible that we can realistically provide fewer new parking spaces doing so than with DPS. However, considering the advantages of doing so, that is not a bad thing. If UDOT wants some of their money back because fewer spaces are to be provided, give it back. To do otherwise is a Faustian bargain.

To summarize again:

- Don’t accept an unneeded albatross just because somebody else is paying for it.
- Since we’re keeping Main Street parking, there’s no need.
- Residents and visitors love Moab’s rural feel. Don’t needlessly damage it.
  - It’s the tallest building downtown and will block view of the rims.
  - It’s ugly, like trying to put makeup on Gollum.
- It won’t be heavily used whether we charge for parking or not.
  - It won’t pay for itself
- It won’t accommodate oversize vehicles.
- It will further congest an already congested area.
- Expansion of dispersed surface lots makes more sense.