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No Downtown Parking, No Visitors

THE Oklahoma City council is concerned about the insufficiency of public parking downtown. Occasional visitors to that area have been concerned about it for the past 20 years.

The success of Myriad Gardens will depend upon a solution. If this recreational-cultural facility is to attract a myriad of visitors they must have convenient parking at reasonable rates.

Otherwise it cannot be patronized mainly by downtown workers. That is not a small crowd, because there probably are more of them than ever before. Still, it might not be enough.

Downtown workers need places to park and Central Oklahoma Parking and Transportation Authority is trying to accommodate them. It has reserved about 80 percent of some 7,000 spaces in its six garages for monthly parkers. This doesn't leave enough for in-and-out parkers.

The pattern of one-way streets and dead-ends is discouraging to many shoppers and visitors. If they can't find places to park or have to

pay up to \$5 for an afternoon they might not come back.

Retail businesses remaining downtown depend primarily upon patronage by people who work downtown. They generate a lot of trade but to revitalize the district more is needed.

Three or four years ago the director of COPTA was talking of plans to increase mobile parking to a total of 10,000 spaces in the central business district during the 1980s. There are considerably more than the city-owned 7,000 spaces but the total is still far short of 10,000.

A solution will not be easy, because little land is left upon which to build parking facilities. It is costly and investors may be reluctant to try to compete with COPTA.

The problem that Oklahoma City faces has been tackled by nearly all large cities and solved by few. Tulsa has one-way streets but they are decipherable and visitors can find places to park.

Downtown Kansas City's problems mounted when Crown Center was built not far away. Dallas has

convenient access to downtown but retail trade is scattered in scores of business districts all around.

Chicago spent \$17 million trying to revive retail business on State street but two big department stores have closed and others reportedly are planning to reduce space or close next year.

A gloomy note on downtown districts was sounded in a comprehensive review of the outlook for the next 50 years published in the May 9 issue of U.S. News and World Report. It said that decaying cities will shrink in population, in economic influence and in political clout.

Some experts cited predicted that cities will become more "pleasure oriented," serving as centers of fun and games.

Whether for business, finance, industry or pleasure, people will go downtown in large numbers only if they can get through congested streets and find convenient places to park.

The parking problem won't go away but customers might.