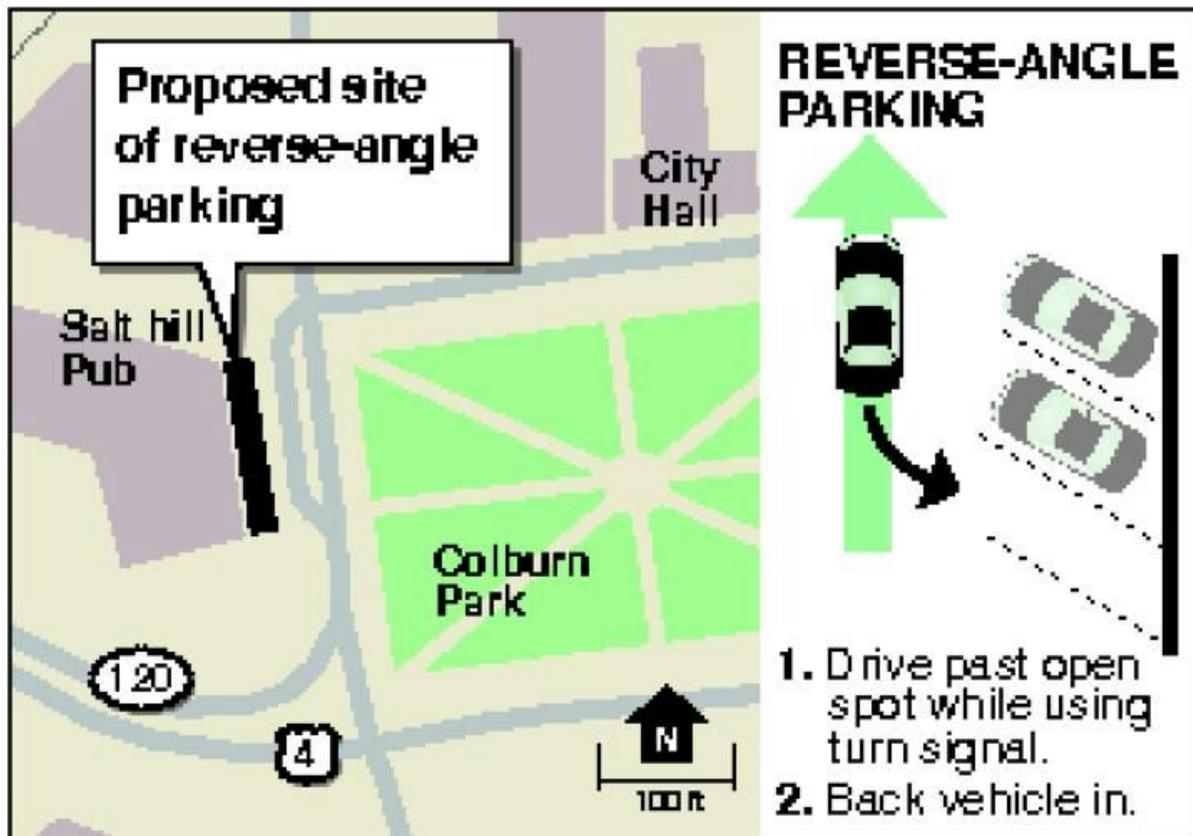


VALLEY NEWS

Lebanon Council to Vote on Traffic Proposals



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By Ben Conarck

Valley News Staff Writer

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Lebanon — The City Council tonight will weigh several traffic calming measures recommended by the Pedestrian and Bicyclist Advisory Committee for the Colburn Park area downtown.

The package includes reverse-angle parking spaces that have proved controversial in nearby communities. If approved, the measures could be in place as early as June.

Reverse-angle parking, which require the motorist to drive beyond the parking spot and then back up into the space , would be implemented along the parking area in front of Salt hill Pub and Citizens Bank on West Park Street.

Planning and Zoning Director Andrew Gast-Bray has championed reverse-angle parking as a way to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists . He said that while Lebanon residents are understandably skeptical about the change, there is also widespread acknowledgement that the current configuration of traffic flow around Colburn Park is flawed.

“The issue becomes, if we don’t do anything, we’re going to stay exactly where we are,” Gast-Bray said yesterday. “Colburn Park is actually pretty hostile to pedestrians and bicyclists, and it’s the main destination in Lebanon.”

According to city data, an average of about 6,700 cars flow daily through the Colburn Park area, where routes 120 and 4 intersect.

Reverse-angle parking has been successfully implemented in more than a dozen major metropolitan areas across the country, as far away as Seattle and as near as New York City, but it hasn’t always gone smoothly in smaller communities.

In Plattsburgh, N.Y., reverse-angle parking survived for only 10 months from July 2003 to May

2004 before the experiment drew to a close. The honeymoon lasted a bit longer in Brunswick, Maine, which implemented the reverse-angle method in 2009 but reverted to more traditional parking last year.

John Foster, Plattsburgh Director of Public Works, said that reverse-angle parking was introduced on a street in front of a row of restaurants, whose owners soon began to complain that the parking spaces were causing confusion among their patrons.

“What we saw was a lot of people would drive down the street and look to their left at the diagonal spaces facing them, but it’s for the vehicles going the other way,” Foster said. He added that vehicles were seen backing out on the wrong side of the street, which eventually led the Plattsburgh City Council to reverse course on the new parking method. It is worth noting, however, that the streets around Colburn Park are one-way only.

Gast-Bray said that the city has chosen an out-of-the-way parking area for the pilot project, and added that, “if it really doesn’t work out, we will re-think it.” He said that city officials are planning to launch a “public outreach and education campaign” to smooth out the learning curve that is typically associated with the parking change.

“We’re really kind of gun-shy about this and trying to be as careful as we can,” said Gast-Bray.

City planners have also recommended that a “model car” be left in one of the parking spaces to indicate to other motorists the proper parking configuration. Senior Planner David Brooks said the car could be a city-owned vehicle or belong to someone who works in a nearby building, but at this point, it is “just a suggestion.”

Dan Burden, co-founder of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute and nationwide advocate for reverse-angle parking, said that in addition to increasing pedestrian safety, reverse-angle parking helps to “recivilize” downtown areas by calming traffic and adding more parking spaces.

“Thirty to 50 years ago when we started to build suburbs and bleed the downtowns of their life, merchants started to move out,” said Burden. “Downtowns lost their luster, they lost their character and (vehicle) speeds increased ... Now it’s time to come back and put in those tools that really start to repopulate the downtowns with life, activity, and help the mom and pop stores.”

Other Changes

Aside from the parking experiment, the Pedestrian and Bicyclist Advisory Committee have outlined numerous other changes for the streets around Colburn Park. Some notable proposals include:

- Directional information painted on the pavement after the mid-block crosswalk on South Park Street informing motorists which lane to be in for travel toward routes 4 and 120.

- Shortening the crosswalk from Colburn Park toward the library by reorienting it at a diagonal angle, which would make the path more perpendicular to traffic. Brooks said the crosswalk is currently more than 90 feet long, which poses a significant safety hazard.

- Additional diagonal parking spaces on South Park and East Park Street to increase parking capacity and narrow travel lanes for traffic calming purposes.

- Moving the stop sign on School Street farther north to increase visibility for drivers along South Park Street.

- “Painting out” corners around Colburn park to discourage drivers from cutting the corners tightly.

So-called “sharrow” markings indicating a shared bike and car lane similar to those that were implemented last year, with additional signs warning motorists that bicyclists are entitled to use

the lane of travel.

Ben Conarck can be reached at bconarck@vnews.com or 603-727-3213.