

# Paving The Way

New Parking Lot To Take Place Of Former Children's Museum

By **DOUG MANNERS**

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**HARRISONBURG** — Construction crews are tearing down a Main Street mainstay on Court Square to put up a parking lot.

The former Harrisonburg Children's Museum building, which stretches back to North Federal Street, is coming crashing down in pieces this week.

Downtown Renaissance LC, David Lee's investment company, owns the roughly 12,000-square-foot rectangular structure.

Within about two months, Lee hopes to have a metered parking lot open for public use in its place, with room for 10 to 24 parking spaces.

While some would argue that downtown has ample parking — mostly free of charge for between 30 minutes and 10 hours in cityowned lots or garages — Lee sees a need for more spaces around the northeast block of Court Square.

“The thing about parking in this community is, if it's not within sight of the store, I don't think people consider that as convenient parking,” he said. “Downtown is growing [in areas] where there's parking.”

Lee, whose investment company owns other properties around the new parking lot, hopes the additional parking spaces within sight of shops like Garrison Press and Downtown Fine Furniture provide a boost for businesses in the area.

Crews already have demolished most of the back end of the building on North Federal Street. Dancing Feet, which used to occupy that space, moved to the Duke's Plaza shopping center on South Main Street.

The front of the brick structure will meet the wrecking ball next. That part of the building has sat vacant since the children's museum moved a few blocks south to a larger space in 2010.

From now on, downtown property owners will need City Council's blessing to pave the way for new parking.

This month, council approved amending its ordinance governing parking lots in the downtown business district by a 3-2 vote. It changed the code to allow parking lots only after a specialuse permit is approved.

The old ordinance allowed parking lots as a byright use.

Stacy Turner, the city's director of planning and community development, told council that the amendment helps planning for the future of downtown.

Councilmen David Wiens and Ted Byrd voted against the amendment. Wiens wanted to study the issue further, while Byrd raised concerns about discouraging private parking lots.

— *Staff writer Preston Knight contributed to this report.*

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