

Roaming Around Reidsville

By Angela G. Stadler
Public Information Officer
City of Reidsville

The downtown has been called the “front porch” of a vibrant, thriving community. In Reidsville, we are blessed to have a wonderful downtown area with an eclectic mix of retail businesses and restaurants. Businesses come and go, but we have been lucky to have some long-term merchants in our downtown, along with several new “up and coming” businesses.

Like many cities and towns across the state and nation, we have wrestled with the best way to provide parking in these downtown areas. Do you limit the amount of time vehicles are allowed to park in downtown parking spaces? Or do you lift the restrictions so that people can have the time to shop and eat for as long as they want?

Let’s face it! In small towns, we have become a little spoiled. We expect to be able to park right in front of whatever shop or restaurant we are visiting. When we can’t, it is immediately a problem of we don’t have enough downtown parking! Yet downtown Reidsville has some 974 parking spaces, private and public. Again, it may be that the parking is just not available where we want it to be!

“Downtown Reidsville does not have a parking problem – we have plenty of spaces,” says Reidsville Downtown Corporation President Eric Smith. “We need to make sure we are educating our visitors and directing them to the existing public parking areas. We have taken a huge step towards that goal by putting up more directional signage pointing to the larger free parking lots. Also, we want to enhance the pedestrian-friendly aspects of the downtown so that people will actually be encouraged to walk a few blocks rather than feeling like they have to park in front of each shop they visit.”

A complaint of government is that it is always slow to respond to situations. While not always very popular, a slow, steady process works well for government because then we are able to carefully weigh the situation, look at various scenarios and work out what we hope will be the best solution for all (or at best the least painful!) all while giving everyone the chance to respond on a particular issue.

Complaints about the lack of parking in downtown Reidsville prompted the Reidsville City Council to get the opinion of the Reidsville Downtown Corporation (RDC) Board of Directors on parking enforcement in the area. The board tabled any decisions until a survey could be completed. Unfortunately, the electronic survey taken of downtown merchants and business owners drew very few responses. Only seven replies came back, and they were a mixed bag: one wanted two-hour enforcement; five said no enforcement; and one said “other” as long as the enforcement was consistent. The RDC Board was split on its vote as well, and the issue went back to Council.

At its March 20th meeting, the Reidsville City Council voted to change the City’s Ordinance involving downtown parking. The Council voted to eliminate time limits on parking, but other parking violations can still be ticketed. The reasoning was based on information staff shared at the recent Council Retreat. Roger Brooks, a renowned international expert on downtown revitalization, has an interesting take on downtown parking situations. Staff noted that Roger Brooks has several items of mention, including:

- Some of the heaviest shopping districts have the fewest parking spaces per square foot of retail space.
- Usually communities have two-hour parking to discourage employees from parking there... but you punish your customers.
- Any pedestrian friendly or popular downtown, the average person will spend four hours.
- Two-hour parking dramatically reduces spending and repeat visits.
- Downtown should have four-hour (or free) parking.
- Two-hour parking is fine, as long as you point to where there is longer term parking.
- Let's be blunt: two-hour parking is a good way to kill a downtown.

So, the Council is going to test these theories and see how it works out. Of course, businesses should also do their part. An age-old problem has been employees parking in front of the shops or in front of adjacent shops. One solution to that is for business owners to follow the lead of downtown businesses like Café 99 and Reidsville Area Foundation. They have made inviting entranceways into their businesses from the back. While this is not possible for every business, such updates to downtown buildings would definitely be aesthetically pleasing (and may be eligible for façade improvement monies from the Municipal Service District tax that funds downtown grants).

As mentioned earlier, the City has put up additional signage in the past year to highlight where parking is available for both visitors and residents alike. The newest addition to the downtown parking landscape is the lot at the corner of Morehead Street and Martin Luther King Drive, but public parking lots are also available on Morehead, Main, Market, Gilmer and Settle. And yes, you might have to walk a little ways, but it helps with any residual guilt from eating a big meal at one of the downtown restaurants like 24 Blackbirds, Café 99, Carolina Café, Celtic Fringe, Downtown Dog House or Sophisticated Soul or a delicious treat from Simply Sweet! Of course, you can also “walk off” a decadent cappuccino from one of the newest additions to the downtown, Sip Coffeehouse.

I don't know about you but a great date night would be at one of these restaurants that stays open in the evening and then you can either listen to the live entertainment where offered or take in a movie at the historic Rockingham Theatre. The downtown also offers two event centers – the new Beau La Vie venue has joined the Reidsville Event Center as a great place to throw a party. Lucky City Brewing Co-Op will begin renovations of its building on Gilmer Street in the near future as well.

That is what is so great about downtown Reidsville – the unique mix of services provided by the local businesses. On our City's “main street” you can get meal, get your hair cut, and spend the day shopping for new or used merchandise from clothing to jewelry to mattresses and furniture. If you are more into antiques or collectibles, those are available too. Or you can get a good book from the local bookstore or from the Reidsville Public Library. Need a health checkup? Consider doing yoga? Want something welded? Looking for a musical instrument? How about a shoe repaired? Downtown Reidsville has a little bit of everything!

If you are interested in finding a space in downtown Reidsville to set up shop, contact the City's Economic Development Director Jeff Garstka at 336-347-2307, jgarstka@reidsvillenc.gov or Main Street Manager Missy Matthews at 336-349-1111, mmatthews@reidsvillenc.gov.

In other news around Reidsville:

Lake Reidsville Trails Ribbon Cutting.

On Thursday, April 12, residents are encouraged to come out to Lake Reidsville for the official ribbon cutting and grand opening of the Lake Reidsville Trails. The ribbon cutting will be held at 12 noon at the lake located at 630 Water Works Road. Hot dogs will be provided. Also, it will be an opportunity for citizens to comment on plans for approximately 40 acres of land adjacent to Lake Reidsville. City staff, assisted by the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA), is working on creating a Murray Point Master Plan for this property, which was a generous donation by the Murray family. Later in the month, on April 22, you can hike and bike the area's newest hiking and biking trail! Meet out at Lake Reidsville at 2 p.m. across from the soccer trail. For more information about either of these events, call Reidsville Parks & Recreation Superintendent Fred Thompson at 336-349-1091.

Other Events at Parks & Rec Facilities in April!

The Reidsville Parks & Recreation facilities will be hosting several events and activities in April.

- April 5 at 10 a.m. – Presentation on the Countywide Sales Tax Initiative at RCARE, 201 North Washington Avenue
- April 7 at sunrise – Crappie Fishing Tournament at Lake Reidsville, 630 Water Works Road
- April 18 from 4-6 p.m. – Career Readiness Expo at the Reidsville Teen Center, 506 Sprinkle Street

Decrease in Lake Pass Fees for Outside-City Senior Citizens.

Beginning last month, senior citizens living outside the Reidsville City limits began seeing a reduction in Lake Pass costs for Lake Reidsville and Lake Hunt. At its recent Retreat, Reidsville City Council lowered the outside-City rates for senior citizens from \$95.00 to \$65.00 per lake. All other lake fees approved in February of 2017 remain the same.

Farmers Market gearing up to open in May

The first Saturday in May (May 5th) the local Farmers Market returns to Market Square in downtown Reidsville. The 2017 season saw a banner year for the Market Square market, which was up to 18 vendors, along with several one-time participants. Don't forget! SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (Women, Infants & Children) programs participate at the Farmer's Market, which accepts SNAP/EBT along with credit and debit cards. The Market is held Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 7 a.m. until 1 p.m. or when the merchandise runs out! And as the weather gets warmer, exercise enthusiasts can visit Market Square starting the first week of May for the free Zumba classes. Starting at 6 p.m., the hour-long classes are held Mondays and Wednesdays through September, weather permitting.

Become a Part of Team Reidsville!

As part of its "Rise Up Reidsville" campaign designed to recruit people to live, work and play in Reidsville, the City has launched a new City tourism-related website, RiseUpReidsville.com, in addition to its governmental site, reidsvillenc.gov. But it doesn't end there! The City also has a new Facebook page, TeamReidsville, which is designed to showcase events, activities and more from across the City not just City-sponsored events like those found at the City of Reidsville and Market Square Facebook pages. Check them out!