

# The Daily Journal

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## Officials claim ordinance will end parking problems

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**CRANFORD** — A series of 21 ordinances, which together will put in motion a 150-space downtown parking expansion plan, is expected to pass the Township Committee tonight with unanimous approval.

The anticipated action addresses a problem officials say has played Cranford merchants for a long time.

It also marks the first plan implemented by the township's Downtown Management Corporation, which started in 1986, that has received enthusiastic, bipartisan support.

"This is a milestone for the township," said Republican Committeeman Douglas Nordstrom. "That is not an overstatement."

"It should have been the first area addressed by the DMC," said Democratic Committeewoman Carolyn Vollero. But, she added, "We're moving in the right direction."

Scant parking was identified as a major concern in a \$24,000 DMC-sponsored study conducted by New York-based RAMP, Inc. in 1986. But expansion plans did not materialize until June, following township negotiations with NJ Transit. The timing of a \$1.35 million NJ Transit train station renovation project has aided the parking project said officials, who claim the physical space and funding for a parking project otherwise would not have existed.

NJ Transit is contributing \$420,000 to improve three municipal lots, including one on the train station's south side. Cranford is pitching in \$200,000 and is managing the project, if legislation passes tonight.

The resulting 150-plus parking spots represent a 10-percent increase in available space, a percentage one downtown specialist familiar with Cranford called "damn good."

Beyond the physical expansion, the plan will shift commuter parking to the perimeters of the downtown area and implement a commuter permit program.

Prime parking spaces downtown are typically filled early in the day by inbound and outbound commuters. Shoppers who arrive later are left with slim pickings in municipal lots and at meters on the street.

The end result, according to merchants, is damage to the retail economy.

"Parking is the single most important factor for bringing people to retail stores," said Donald Smartt, whose company, The Community Advocates, helped develop the DMC's long-term improvement plan.

Committeeman Edwin Force said he was sympathetic to the merchants, but said they contribute to their own problems by filling space that should be left for customers.

Now, the merchants, or "inbound commuters," will be assigned their own permit-parking area similar to that assigned to outbound commuters, and spaces in the center of town will be left to shoppers.

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