

Deal puts parking garage on Rowan Blvd.

By Jessica Beym

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GLASSBORO — Accessible parking on Rowan Boulevard has long been discussed as a key factor in making the quintessential college downtown atmosphere feasible.

Rowan University, through its ongoing partnership with Glassboro and developers Sora Holdings, LLC, is making that a possibility now that it's agreed to pay for the construction of a \$30 million parking garage right on the boulevard.

The Board of Trustees approved the contract with Sora this week.

Rowan University President Dr. Donald Farish said the university had been planning to build its own garage, perhaps at a cheaper price, on its own land adjacent to the roundabout on U.S. Route 322.

But taking up what little land it has left on its main campus with a hulking concrete garage that would be seen from the road wasn't the best idea, Farish said.

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The short-term solution to dealing with the college's pressing parking needs is to create surface lots where the existing Mansion Park apartments are. Those aging buildings are expected to be demolished shortly after graduation. A contract for the demo work was also issued this week by the board.

But, Farish said "that's not going to work forever."

The need for parking was only exacerbated this year with the construction of the first phase of student apartments on Rowan Boulevard. The second phase will be completed later this summer, in time for the fall semester. When it's complete, there will be close to 900 beds for upper-classmen.

While it may cost the university a bit more than first anticipated — Farish estimated about \$200,000 a year for the duration of the 30-year lease, or \$6 million — partnering with Sora and the borough to have the garage built on the boulevard will be better for all parties, the university and borough officials agreed.

"It's worth it to spend a little more to be in the downtown," Farish said.

The garage may be up to five stories tall and will have about 1,200 parking spots — about 900 of which will be dedicated for Rowan University students.

Borough Administrator Joe Brigandi Jr. said Sora will borrow the money as well as build the garage, and then lease it back to Rowan. The additional spots will be used through Sora as parking specifically for the boulevard and the mixed-use buildings set to go up, including the bookstore.

"The nice thing is it creates parking for the commercial that is desperately needed to make the boulevard project work," Brigandi said.

The borough will also gain some revenue from its construction through a payment in lieu of taxes. There will also be a few storefronts at the base of the garage, somewhat disguising it from the street, Farish said.

The garage is expected to be built between the student housing and the bookstore, Farish said.

Construction could start in the fall of next year, Brigandi estimated.

