The City has taken the lead in responding to the projected loss of on-street parking when Light Rail Transit (LRT) is built on University Avenue by creating a parking program to provide forgivable loans to business and property owners to improve their off-street parking lots.

Councilmembers Russ Stark and Melvin Carter III, and Mayor Coleman, said the Neighborhood Commercial Parking Pilot Program will help business and property owners prepare for the changes light rail will bring to the University Avenue commercial corridor.

The plan for the Program comes from a report titled, Mitigating the Loss of Parking in the Central Corridor, which was completed in April of this year by City and Metropolitan Council staff in response to concerns about the projected loss of much of the on-street parking on University Avenue when LRT is built. The parking report recommended corridor-wide parking solutions for improving the management of on-street parking, for developing comprehensive and consistent parking signage, and for using new technology to enforce parking more effectively.

One of the recommendations from the report is the development of a competitive grant program to make forgivable loans to improve private parking lots and encourage business and property owners to share them. With no other funding available at this point, Councilmembers Stark and Carter and Mayor Coleman have taken the lead in helping finance commercial parking improvements by establishing the Neighborhood Commercial Parking Pilot Program, which was approved Wednesday by the Housing and Redevelopment Authority using Year Round STAR funding approved the same day by the City Council.

The idea behind this program is to support business owners in developing plans for parking solutions that can improve customer and employee parking for their business before construction of the LRT begins, Councilmember Stark said.

City, Met Council, and Design Center staff have been facilitating intensive workshops to develop a plan of action for improving parking in each of the eleven critical areas identified in the report as being most affected by the loss of parking spaces. All University Avenue businesses will be eligible to apply for mitigation funds. Priority will be given to those identified as part of the eleven critical areas.

I have heard loud and clear the desire for parking options to be preserved along the Central Corridor. Though we face a number of budgetary concerns in City Hall, I am encouraged by the opportunity to work together with my colleagues to find creative solutions in direct response to my constituents concerns, stated Councilmember Carter.

There has been a lot of discussion about the loss of parking on the avenue in the past year, said Steve Bernick, owner of the Milbern Clothing Company, but its great to see some positive movement in the direction of helping businesses help themselves to parking solutions.

Central Corridor is the opportunity of a lifetime, but we must take steps to ensure this $1 billion development opportunity benefits those who have already invested in the avenue. Helping businesses develop plans to deal with the loss of parking spots on University Avenue is the right

thing to do. This program will help current businesses continue serving current customers while attracting new customers the line will bring, Mayor Coleman said.

Applications for these funds will be available in October 2009, with project implementation planned to start in spring of 2010.

Business and property owners can be added to an update list on this program by calling or emailing the Ward 4 Council office at 651-266-8641 or ward4@ci.stpaul.mn.us