





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## Plan for robotic garage may give parking a lift

**The owner of an Irish pub in South Tampa will be able to fit more spaces on less land.**

By JANET ZINK, Times Staff Writer  
 Published May 20, 2005

In a region where parking is increasingly a problem, two local developers have come up with a solution.

Colin Breen, owner of the South Tampa Irish pub Four Green Fields, plans to build a 180-space robotic parking garage on a parking lot two doors down from the popular watering hole.

"It allows a greater intensity of development on a piece of land and allows more parking on a smaller area," said Steve Michelini, a land-use consultant for Breen. Breen will also construct a hotel, possibly with an Irish theme, on the site.

Breen originally planned to build a conventional parking garage. While researching robotic parking garages on the Internet, he discovered one of the world's leading manufacturers was in Clearwater. He figured he was fated to invest in the technology.

The new plan allows Breen to fit more cars on less land. The traditional garage would have had a footprint of more than 32,000 square feet. This one takes up 6,000 square feet.

That means Breen was able to design more green space into his hotel project and also preserve some surface parking.

The Tampa City Council approved Breen's plans at a zoning hearing Thursday.

"The garage might be a tourist attraction in itself," council member John Dingfelder said.

Triangle Development will build a 450-space robotic garage at Harrison Village, a 141-unit condominium and retail complex on Fort Harrison Avenue at Jones Street in Clearwater.

Robotic Parking, a Clearwater-based company owned by German-born engineer Gerhard Haag, is building both garages.

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Haag used to work for Krupp, a German company famed for its automated parking systems.

He patented his own system in the mid 1990s.

In 2003, Haag's company completed construction on the country's first robotic parking garage in Hoboken, N.J. Besides the two local projects, he's designing robotic garages for Fort Lauderdale, Miami and Brooklyn.

Haag's designs feature multiple elevators with backup motors, a backup computer system and a generator in case of a power outage.

"Anything mechanical can break down," Haag said. "The trick is that if anything breaks down, the garage still operates."

The robotic garages are much smaller than conventional parking facilities. They don't need ramps or stairwells or extra space for opening car doors, Michelini said. They're safer, because no one has to walk through a dark, deserted garage to get to their cars, Breen said.

Motorists drive their cars onto a pallet and then exit. An elevator moves vertically to the proper level and then horizontally to deliver the car to its resting space.

Car retrieval takes about two minutes, Haag said.

"It's like a smart warehouse system for parking," said Dale Denda, a researcher at the Parking Market Research Company in McLean, Va. "The garage works fine. We know that because there are literally hundreds of them working in Europe."

Fewer than five operate in the United States.

Building codes and fire concerns often stall proposals for robotic parking garages, Denda said.

Breen said his garage will have a sprinkler system and has already been approved by Tampa's building department.

And by Breen's calculations, it will be less expensive to construct than a traditional garage.

The robotic parking garage is something Tampa Bay might be ready for, Breen said.

"As land value downtown gets more expensive and less available, you're going to have to do something," he said.

Breen's garage will blend into the design of his hotel and provide parking for hotel guests and patrons of Four Green Fields. He also will offer parking to St. John's Episcopal Middle School either in the garage or on the ground.

But Breen said he might eventually rent spaces to other drivers in the community. "It can never hurt to have more parking," Breen said.

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