

# Capitola grapples with meter proposal

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CAPITOLA — "Masquerading meters" may lie in downtown Capitola's future as the City Council Thursday night directed staff to look into "disguising" parking meters as part of the long-controversial installation plan.

Although the council majority refused to take a stand, the installation of some 300 meters in the village appeared — for the first time — to be a favorable revenue-raising solution.

At stake would be the purchase of a "close-in" parcel as a parking lot to deal with the long-standing problem. The dream of a fixed-rail transit system was placed on the back burner.

Council direction to City Manager Steve Burrell included "disguising" the meters for aesthetic purposes and determining how many meters and posts would actually be needed. Councilmen also want more information on the formation of a Parking Authority, which would develop an implementation plan for the meters.

On the insistence of Councilman Michael Routh, however, the council also agreed to get more information on an entirely different revenue-raising venture — the formation of another Redevelopment Plan encompassing downtown and the Bay Avenue area.

A 41st Avenue Redevelopment Plan is already in effect. Area improvements will take place through any future increases in

property taxes within the redevelopment area.

The two senior councilmembers, Routh and Mayor Ron Graves, were on opposite sides of the issue and engaged in a long exchange. The other three councilmen, Jerry Clarke, Bob Bucher and Dennis Beltram — who eventually are going to represent the "swing" votes — did not commit themselves.

The outspoken Routh described the installation of meters as "abandoning the direction the council has taken the past 11 years to preserve the characteristics of the village.

"We can pave over the whole damn town and village as a parking lot and it would still be filled with cars," he said.

Routh cited Carmel as an example of a city providing more and more parking and still having a horrendous problem. He maintained Capitola residents "would have to live with the sacrifices of meters for 365 days a year to satisfy the 60 peak days a year for visitors."

At one point, an exasperated Routh turned to Graves and said, "Ron, if you eliminate parking problems down there by putting in meters, I'll eat your hat."

Graves countered that meters would not deter the "quality of life" as Routh implied. He maintained the "least intrusive" solution were meters and advocated them on a trial basis.

"If they don't work after a year or so, I'll be the first one to want them taken out," said Graves. He added that under proposed plans, the initial cost of meters

would be financed through a five-year additional \$100 business license fee for downtown businesses.

Like an earlier hearing, sentiment from downtown merchants was surprisingly supportive of meters. In October, 15 persons spoke and only two opposed meters in any instance.

This time only four persons spoke. Merchant Dolly Walker advocated meters, saying, "We desperately need something."

Graves summed up their feeling by saying, "Businesses are willing to tax themselves because they see the need. This may be an experiment we can all live with."

Routh, for one, was not convinced and would not let his Redevelopment Plan suggestion die. He said the additional tax increments could possibly derive as much as the anticipated \$300,000 a year meters would.

By taking in the Bay Avenue area, the new area would include the Nob Hill shopping center and the new Crossroads complex. Routh termed it "at least something to study" and "certainly better than meters."

Councilmen barely touched upon the parking solution alternatives of fixed-rail transit or the purchase of Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park for "close-in" parking. Such plans would come about through the Parking Authority, if and when it is established and if and when revenues are derived.

Burrell is to report back to the council on Jan. 27.