

Capitola ponders buying land to aid parking

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel Staff Writer

Capitola is considering buying a mobile home park and converting it to a parking lot as the City Council continues to grapple with its long-standing problem over insufficient parking in the village area.

At the same time, councilmen were adamant that no current park residents would be displaced.

At its meeting Tuesday, the majority of councilmen said they would consider installing parking meters downtown to raise money to purchase the property.

However, the council turned thumbs down on an earlier parking meter plan. That proposal called for parking meters simply for raising revenue.

The possible purchase of the mobile home park, the Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park in Capitola, was made public for the first time by ex-Councilwoman Carin Mudgett. It perked the interest of the council and the public. The 83-space park, located behind City Hall and walking distance from the village area, is currently for sale.

Ironically, if the city were to buy the park for parking, it would go against

what the council has fought for during the past three years — the preservation of mobile home parks. The council has even initiated a special mobile home park zone to prevent change of use.

But councilmen said the conversion would take place slowly — if it happened at all — and no park residents would be displaced.

One fact everyone could agree on, though, before anything is done about the long-standing parking problem — money is needed.

Fifteen persons during the 2½-hour hearing endorsed the original three-pronged proposal by the mayor's select committee on parking. Seven speakers favored meters only if "close-in" parking could be developed, such as with Pacific Cove. Only two persons opposed meters in any instance.

The committee proposal that prompted the hearing calls for the installation of 300 parking meters downtown, to be financed by an additional \$100 business license fee for village businesses (for five years). The anticipated \$300,000 a year from meters could go toward alternatives like a permanent shuttle bus parking lot and/or a fixed rail transit system utilizing existing Southern Pacific tracks.

While City Manager Steve Burrell maintained the feasibility of such alternatives and Mayor Ron Graves lauded it as "a start," Councilman Michael Routh described the use of meters to finance parking as "bunk."

Routh cited the past work of the council regarding preservation of the village, pointing to the "aesthetics" of meters. "I feel this direction (meters) is 180 degrees opposed to what direction the council has taken in the last 10 years," he said.

Routh gained the support from Councilman Bob Bucher, as well as partial support from two others. Councilman Jerry Clarke called meters "a dreadful idea but perhaps a necessary one." Councilman Dennis Beltram said meters would be a "detriment aesthetically," but he wasn't entirely opposed.

As it was obvious no decision was going to be made, a frustrated Graves garnered the loudest and longest applause of the evening when he said, "I'm embarrassed by the council because I really feel we're going to do nothing."

Graves pointed out that numerous past committees had studied the parking problem and nothing ever was done.

He described his fellow councilmen's comments as being "wishy-washy."

Routh, who has been on the council the longest — next to Graves — took exception. "If you were looking for a quick answer after an hour of discussion, I think you're wrong," Routh said. "Then, come up with a concrete solution," replied Graves.

The council eventually directed staff to further study the proposal including looking into aesthetics of meters, costs of possible parking lots and other possible funding solutions.

Graves told The Sentinel afterward that he wasn't disappointed at the result. "I just felt the first comments we got from the council was lip service," he said. "I would be happy for staff to bring back more information. The key to any solution is monetary."

The supporters of the committee's proposal agreed. Local merchant Rileen Orlando may have summed it up best when she said, "We have to get the money before we do anything else. With that money, we have a lot of options. Maybe rail isn't the best solution, but it is a solution."

Dolly Walker, president of the Village Merchants Association, pre-

sented a petition with 27 merchants favoring the meter proposal. She described meters as the "necessary evil needed to generate revenue."

Cindy Cline was the most outspoken foe of parking meters. She felt meters "would bring about all the other kinds of urban blight you see in big cities."