

Experimental Depot Hill parking plan OK'd

CAPITOLA — A scaled-down parking permit program for the Depot Hill neighborhood was approved on an experimental basis this summer by the City Council Thursday night.

The program, which is expected to begin in about a month, will prohibit public parking on streets in Depot Hill on weekends and holidays. Only residents or visitors with special permits will be allowed to park on the street between the hours of 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The Depot Hill neighborhood is located on the cliffs above Capitola Village. The permit program is expected to alleviate a neighborhood parking crunch once pay parking is instituted downtown this summer and visitors flood residential streets looking for free parking.

As proposed, the permit program for Depot Hill was to operate seven days a week through September. Council members, upon hearing divided testimony from a dozen area residents, decided to limit parking restrictions to weekends.

The council did retain provisions calling for free permits to residents, despite testimony from former Mayor Ron Graves and former Councilwoman Carin Mudgett calling for a "nominal" fee. As approved, Depot Hill residents will be given on-street parking permits for whatever number of cars they own. They will also be given two free visitor permits per residence.

Graves and Mudgett argued that it was unfair that residents in the village have to pay \$5 for each permit under a similar program that has been operating for years.

"If the people (in Depot Hill) really have a parking problem, they should be grateful to pay a fee to get rid of people parking everywhere," said Mudgett. "The financial aspect is totally out of whack. A lack of a fee just doesn't make sense."

Only Councilman Jerry Clarke was swayed by the argument. Clarke was the only one to vote against the program because he favored a

nominal fee. Clarke is a resident of Depot Hill along with Councilman Bob Bucher and Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan.

The others sided with Mayor Michael Routh. He maintained it was the city imposing this program on the Depot Hill residents, not the other way around as it was with the already-instituted program in the village.

Escalona Drive resident Bill Kuettel presented a petition of neighbors against the program, maintaining there wasn't a parking problem. Of the 33 residents on Escalona he spoke to, 23 were against, six for and four didn't care, he said.

"It seems like we're getting carried away making exclusive parking," Kuettel said. He added the program would also be detrimental to downtown businesses whose owners "need all the parking they can get."

Routh and Councilman Dennis Beltram said the parking problem would definitely materialize once pay parking begins downtown. "You're going to see people parking in all kinds of wierd spots just to get away from paying," said Beltram.

Clarke added that Kuettel's petition "probably only represents 17 to 20 percent of the residents." Several other residents testified in

favor of the program, reminding the council that Kuettel was not speaking for all of them.

Ultimately the council seemed to agree with the sentiment of Graves, who urged the council give the program a try. "At least you'll be able to say you tried to get the beach-goer out of neighborhoods," he told the council. "If it doesn't work, you can always retract it."

The program allows members of St. John the Baptist Church to park on specific streets for church activities and services. Special arrangements can also be made on a case-by-case basis for large gatherings.

City Manager Steve Burrell reported to the council that the city's pay parking downtown is expected to be in operation by early August. Computerized parking banks will be used rather than the usual meter-at-every-stall method. The banks presently are on a ship from the manufacturer in Sweden, he said.

Each bank will handle about 40 parking spaces. Users will put money (50-cents per hour) in the BART-like machines, be dispensed a ticket, which they must place on the dashboard of the car.

Neighborhood meetings will be held in the future to see if residents support the program.