

# Merchants cast jaundiced eye on Aptos parking district idea

By CAROLYN  
HEEBNER-SWIFT

Aptos merchants were largely skeptical Wednesday in their response to the suggestion of a parking district for the village core.

Only a handful showed up at the Aptos branch library to discuss the community's parking troubles with county transportation planners, who had been directed earlier this month by the county Planning Commission to begin a study of village parking as part of the Aptos traffic analysis.

County staff members at first enlisted the assistance of the Aptos Chamber, which set up Wednesday's meeting and notified the merchants. Still, less than a dozen persons attended, and only about half of these represented the business community.

Steven Raas, assistant civil engineer, and Ron Marquez, principal transportation planner, repeatedly assured the audience that the county is not attempting to initiate creation of the parking district. They said their goal is only to point out the present and future problems that are likely to worsen as development increases within the village core, and to urge businesses to work together toward a solution.

"If there is a study, either public or private, we hope the planning is done by the business people in the village, while county planners provide the technical support," said Marquez. "This is your village, your parking and your problem. The solution is up to you."

The transportation planners said the problem is foreseeable in the future as parking for longtime businesses is depleted at the same time additional spaces are created to serve new construction. It is likely the customers for the established stores will try to use the new spaces, and the result could be tension and resentment within the business community as a whole.

"You have the chance to coordinate parking before the development occurs and all the available space is filled," Raas said. "This is an opportunity to decide beforehand how it will go."

Raas spent the early part of the meeting explaining a three-page handout on the advantages and disadvantages of a parking district. The last page is a questionnaire asking for the opinions of merchants about a parking district and additional comments on the parking problem.

As it is now, Raas said, each business in the village provides its own parking for customers. Some have an oversupply, while others have less than they need. A good deal of the parking is technically trespassing — either on privately or publicly owned land. This system apparently works as long as nobody seems to mind, the planners added, but these spaces will disappear as development continues.

An example is the land adjacent to the T. Hopkins Right-of-Way entrance to the Forest of Nisene Marks Park. Hugh Hudson, developer of the Aptos Station project, pointed out that his property has traditionally been used by village shoppers and visitors to both the Aptos Village Park and the state park. Although the project developers may be required to provide added public parking, the construction still supplants a large area that had previously been available.

The planners avoided a long discussion of proposed circulation systems now under study for the village, but they did mention the possible future realignment of Soquel Drive to create a third "refuge," land for traffic. This change would wipe out the horizontal parking in front of the businesses on the south side of Soquel Drive, and would change the vertical parking across the road to horizontal.

There could be an eventual net loss of a four-to-one reduction in available parking, Marquez said. There may be 20 spaces where there once were 90.

Two options are available regarding parking problems, Raas told merchants. Either the parking system can remain as it is now, or a parking district can be formed.

The district would be

formed by an ordinance following public hearings and determination of the area involved. Proceedings toward formation of the district would end if more than 50 percent of the merchants protested.

"The usual organization of a district is such that the government body purchases land upon which parking areas are developed," staff said. "There are three major funding sources — a parking deficiency fee, an ad valorem tax, and direct parking revenues from parking meters or pay lots."

The parking deficiency fee is one charged to businesses in the district which lack sufficient parking. The ad valorem tax is one assessed with property taxes on all commercial property within boundaries of the district — and there is now question about the ability of the government to levy this tax under rules of Proposition 13. Direct parking revenues can be collected from metered curb parking, a system of fee lots or a combination of the two.

If the parking district is publicly owned, facilities are usually owned, administered and maintained by the government agency, in this case, the county. If it is a privately-owned district, the business people voluntarily band together to form an association to handle community parking problems.

In a private district, Aptos merchants could set up whatever regulations best suits their needs. They could own or lease lots, charge fees

or maintain the lots in a cooperative system.

The advantages include provision of parking, removal of responsibility for lot maintenance from the individual owners, and a coordinated system to benefit the entire business community.

The disadvantages are that some businesses may benefit more than others, based upon their proximity to the parking spaces, and a private district may not be able to gain the needed unanimity of membership.

Edit Cook of Del Mar Gallery agreed. Her business will suffer if parking is relocated away from the shops, she said.

"And realistically, I don't think you can ever get people to cooperate," she said. "The owners are very jealous of their parking spaces."

Marquez said the planning staff will recommend to the county Planning Commission to include the parking district in a list of projects that need to be done in the village, if the business community indicates an interest. He said perhaps \$10,000 in transportation fees generated by new developments can be allotted by the county for a study on the parking situation and the feasibility of a parking district, as well as specific solutions.

While the study will be initiated by the merchants, it is in the best interests of the county to see it happen, Marquez added.

Eventually, the county would also be included as part of the parking district as well, since it must provide parking for users of the Aptos Village Park. The county would therefore be a cooperative member of the parking district.

"I don't want you to commit yourselves to a parking district one way or the other," he added. "But we do want to support you in doing something about the problem."

He again assured the group that the county "has no plan it's waiting to drop on you."

Glenn Specht, representative of Aptos Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber also has no position on the district, but is "in favor of planning for Aptos."

Mrs. Specht will be distributing the questionnaires to Aptos merchants in the village. Interested persons may contact her by calling 688-4329, or obtain details through the chamber office.

Transportation planners also announced that a public

hearing on the Aptos traffic study is scheduled before the

county Planning Commission Sept. 17.

GREEN SHEET  
August 30, 1980

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