

# Capitola hoping meters will solve city's downtown parking problems

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Parking in Capitola Village is going to get more frustrating, impossible as that sounds. New two-hour meters will be installed in the next few weeks, and people lucky enough to find a vacant space will be charged 50-cents an hour to shop, go to the beach or have dinner.

The good news is that the meters are simple, traditional machines that run in six-minute increments and accept nickels, dimes and quarters. The space-age banks that ate

an exclusive diet of quarters and, in turn, spit out little tickets have taken a one-way trip out of town after a brief and unsuccessful trial last year.

"It's a big step, I hope the overall impact is good," said City Manager Steve Burrell.

Burrell is certain the new meters will be easier to use than the banks, but he still isn't sure people will like them. Hours of operation will be 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week, and people will be limited to two hours. If someone puts more money in the meter after two hours, the car will be ticketed.

"This will be more traditional, but people simply don't like to pay money to park," Burrell said. "If there were a way to produce a 200-car parking lot without charging, we'd do it."

The city is buying the Pacific Cove Mobile Home Park behind city hall, which will eventually be converted to a parking lot. No date has been set for the conversion, but Burrell said the project is "moving right along."

Bernie Waymire, who has operated The Plum Tree on Capitola Avenue for the past 25 years, calls the current plan "a last ditch effort."

"What else can we do?" she said. "The City Council never

acted until all possible areas for parking were gobbled up. I hold city councils over the years remiss in this lack of action."

Waymire is with the majority of merchants who felt the parking banks, with the accompanying banners, signs and directions, were a fiasco. She said her customers told her they were inconvenient and hard to understand, in addition to being expensive.

"People who wanted to make a quick trip for a couple of (greeting) cards didn't want to pay 25 cents (to park) for a \$2 purchase. This is a problem and it will continue to be true with any pay parking," she said. "I've never been against parking meters, but I'm concerned to a degree that people will find it more convenient, preferably perhaps, to go elsewhere where there's free parking."

Carin Mudgett, owner of The Craft Gallery in the Village, agreed people might complain, but says that's one tradeoff for having a shop in a prime location.

"I can't wait to have them (meters), I'm anxiously awaiting them," said Mudgett. "There will be a better turnover; people won't park here all day."

Waymire added, "As a group (of merchants) we have to be

better, more appealing, brighter and shinier than our non-metered competition."

Mudgett said the city's free 20-minute parking zones help solve the problem for people who want to make a quick stop in the Village. She said if customers tell her more of the short-term spaces are needed, she'll petition the City Council to get them.

Burrell said he isn't anticipating the same problems with the meters that the city had with the parking banks.

"We expect a high level of compliance," he said. "They should bring in a minimum of \$200,000 a year."

Burrell said the city is trying to sell the abandoned banks, and so far, has managed to get rid of two, at a loss of about 28 percent on the original purchase price. The banks were sold through a broker, and Burrell said he thinks they were bought by a private company for a parking lot. He added that in time, he expects to sell the remaining banks.

Local historian Carolyn Swift said that Capitola has had parking problems since the car first appeared on village streets.

"Capitola was never designed for auto traffic, it was designed for mass transit," she said. "Don't blame Capitola (for parking problems), blame your car."



Kurt Ellison

Capitola City Manager Steve Burrell hopes the parking meters will quiet Village parking complaints.