

Wharf tollgate plan uncertain

By KATHY SALAMON
STAFF WRITER

A plan to replace the parking meters on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf with a parking tollgate may not be as certain as many wharf merchants and city officials believed.

For several months, many have been under the impression that the entrance gate was a foregone conclusion.

Instead of driving onto the wharf and parking at meters, motorists would get a ticket at the gate, park anywhere and pay for parking on the way out. A certain grace period — perhaps 30 minutes — would be allowed free of charge.

A low parking fee would be charged for the first few hours, but then hourly fees would increase the longer a motorist stayed on the wharf. This would

discourage employee parking on the wharf and increase parking turnover.

Many wharf tenants have seen the tollgate plan as a solution to the gridlock and parking problems on the wharf.

And many city officials operated under the assumption that the tollgate is going in. In the city's proposed 1987-88 budget, \$136,000 was allotted specifically for the construction of the tollgate.

But at budget work sessions earlier this week, Santa Cruz City Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt questioned the expenditure.

"There has been no council expression to go ahead with a wharf gate," Wormhoudt said. "This is not a *fait accompli*. I'm still waiting for the policy discussion on it."

Wormhoudt, who once sat on the council's Wharf subcom-

mittee, said she thought "there are a lot of unresolved issues" in regard to the tollgate.

Councilman Joseph Ghio agreed. He noted that the city would lose revenue from parking tickets written for expired meters on the wharf.

But Councilman Michael Rotkin, a member of the Wharf subcommittee and advocate of the tollgate, warned that there will be some unhappy wharf tenants if the tollgate doesn't go through.

"People have been reassured over and over again that this gate is going in," he said.

"We may discover in the middle of this that it's not going to work," Rotkin said. But, he added, it's important the city approach the tollgate with "a good-faith effort" to install it.

City Manager Richard Wilson was asked by the council to

come back with more information on the tollgate so the council could have a detailed discussion on it. Some issues, such as how much revenue the city stands to gain or lose, need to be investigated, council members said.

In the meantime, Ghio suggested making the \$136,000 line-item in the city budget less specific. "Just have it say 'wharf capital improvements.' Then it can be a bathroom or it could be a tollgate," Ghio said.

When one wharf tenant was contacted this morning, he said the possibility that the tollgate won't be installed was news to him.

"We've been told it's not a question of 'if' but a question of 'how,'" said Ward Nolan, owner of Port of Call clothing store.

"The way we understand the tollgate, it's a good thing," he said. "People would still be

able to come out here, pick up their fish, and leave without having to pay.

"The city would gain because it would collect fees all day, from 9 a.m. till the wharf closes, and it will improve the parking situation here by encouraging turnover and getting rid of the gridlock," Nolan said.

"I don't see a down side to it," he added. "I hope they go ahead with it because the parking situation has become unreal."

Robert Stagnaro of Gilda's restaurant noted that similar tollgates in other areas, such as Santa Barbara, have helped to alleviate parking problems there.

"The consent of the tenants is that we would like to see the tollgate," Stagnaro said. "If it doesn't work, it is my understanding that we'd have to do something else. But it's important that they try something."