



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Cars waiting for parking spaces stack up behind a double-parked car in Capitola Village.

Capitola businesses want proof parking tickets cost city money

By ERIN K. QUIRK
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CAPITOLA — As the weekends get warmer and tourists pour into the village, residents are preparing for their annual, summer parking space scramble.

This is not a new problem in Capitola.

But since last week, when Capitola Police Chief Don Braunton suggested raising parking fines, it has been on the minds of many village merchants.

"If the intention of raising fines is to raise more revenue for the city they're going about it in the extremely wrong way," said Lee Walters, owner of the Stockton Bridge Grille in Capitola Village. "It's a negative thing."

Other merchants, some of whom circulated a petition against the fine increase, agreed.

"All the customers are stressed out," said Torhild Rana, co-owner of In The Raw in the Capitola Mercantile. "The only thing they think about coming into the store ... meter, meter, meter."

The parking proposal, which Braunton said is to keep the department from losing money on contested tickets, affects more than just the village. Officers ticket handicap, loading and red zone violators at the mall, the upper village and throughout town. But because parking is at a premium in the village, many merchants feel the proposal targets them.

"The business community is already suffering," said Yvonne Zannis, owner of Yvonne, a clothing store in the village. She added that City Hall and the business communi-

ty always have an adversarial relationship.

"I consider myself an employee of the city because they are making money from my energy," she said. "The easier it is for me to make money, the easier it is for the city to make money. It's people working together."

Braunton said he knew he'd touch off a firestorm with his proposal, but he insists it is not a revenue generating plan.

A short time ago he received the judgment from two contested parking tickets and the bill for them. He said both contestants lost and paid a total of \$46, but the bill cost the city \$50. He said he felt it his duty to bring the discrepancy to the attention of the City Council and let them decide what to do.

"I know the village merchants want to lynch me, but it's not money in my pockets or the police department's pockets," he said.

If a business were providing a service that cost money each time it was used, it wouldn't last long, he added. City Manager Susan Westman agreed that if the city's going to subsidize a service, the council ought to know about it.

But merchants are dying to know just how many people contest tickets; how much money the city is losing per year; and if that number justifies slapping money-spending visitors with a \$30 ticket instead of a \$13-\$23 ticket.

Braunton said he does not yet have those figures. The company in Torrance that processes all the city's tickets did not return repeated phone calls from the Sentinel.

Braunton said it was the bill for the two contested tickets that alerted him to the problem, not an overall department loss.

"We've probably been losing money for two years, it just never occurred to me before," Braunton said.

In a separate but related move, Braunton has also suggested the council raise fines for expired meters and violations of the two-hour time limits — \$13 and \$15 respectively.

The point, he said, is to discourage people from buying the space, as it were, with a \$15 ticket. Braunton said there are about 235 meters in Capitola Village and about the same number in the Pacific Cove Parking Lot behind City Hall. There are additional 2-hour spaces in the back alleys of the village. Braunton said the city begins doling out those parking spaces with approximately 350 resident parking permits it gives each year.

"The village is half full before you even start," he said, adding that it's always been important to merchants that visitors don't take up the spaces all day.

Braunton knew this was also a hot button issue and purposely didn't suggest a price for those tickets. Again, many merchants think it is another example of the city not working with the business community. Zannis said she and many other merchants already pick up the tickets for their employees and customers.

"It's just not a good feeling, it's not a spirit of partnership," Zannis said. "It's sadness to me."

The issue comes before the City Council Thursday, May 22.

Merchants say Village parking is daily trial

CAPITOLA — Next time you're circling Capitola Avenue and the Esplanade praying someone backs out of a space, consider this:

Where do the merchants park?

This is something Laurence Needham, owner of The Piano Store, considers every day.

Even if parking were ample in the Village, Needham couldn't leave his store every two hours to move his car. Parking in village neighborhoods is allowed only until 5 p.m., and sometimes he can't get out of the store by then. So Needham began parking in Upper Village neighborhoods and walking $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to his shop. Then neighbors in the area began putting notes on his car asking him to "please be considerate" and

park elsewhere.

"I think the rules are terribly unfair," said Needham, who pays \$560 a year in fees to maintain public parking. "They can't even give us (merchants) a permit to buy."

Merchant Yvonne Zannis agreed, saying she pays rent just like residents do except she's there more.

"I've been a tenant for 24 years, why am I not given a permit?" she said.

Capitola Police Chief Don Branton said the city has covered this ground many times. He said there are few spots in the Village, and historically, merchants have requested they be reserved for customers, not employees. He said there are two long-term parking options, but both cost

money.

Merchants can park in the Pacific Cove Parking Lot behind City Hall. The lot is wide open during the week but fills by 10 a.m. on weekends and holidays. Six dollars in quarters buys a spot for 12 hours. People may also park in a lot by the freeway for \$3 and the Beach Shuttle, which operates from Memorial Day to the Art and Wine Festival in September, will take them to the Village. The shuttle, Branton said, has been underused.

Needham said the problem could be solved with a merchant permit.

"I sympathize with the merchants but it's not my decision to make," Branton said. "They must take it to the council."

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