

# Who gets to park in Capitola?

## Residents, merchants argue over city's permit parking

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CAPITOLA — Downtown residents and merchants alike argued for more than two hours Thursday over Capitola's neighborhood parking permit programs.

It turned out to be much ado about nothing.

The issue was taken up by the Capitola City Council, but council members took no action to change its permit programs, which prohibit public on-street parking in certain neighborhoods.

Instead, they called for an end to the bickering between Capitola Village merchants, who feel the parking restrictions are turning away potential customers, and residents, who don't want their neighborhoods crowded by visitors.

Council members vowed to continue giving neighborhoods back to residents. While declining to appoint yet another special parking committee, they urged interested persons to join an already-established parking committee of the Capitola Village Association.

At one point, 14-year veteran Councilman Michael Routh told the large audience, "Quit getting so damn emotional over the parking problem for no reason at all." Fellow 14-year Councilman Ron Graves added, "I'm tired of everybody bad-mouthing each other."

The no-action came despite a 300-signature petition against permit programs by merchant Jeanne Goodwin, as well as a threatened lawsuit by anti-restriction parking enthusiast Ethelwynne Wilson. Wilson called the programs "discriminatory," adding "perhaps the courts may be the only way to go."

Councilman Jerry Clarke maintained the petition lacked credibility in that many of the signers were visitors.

"We're not elected by tourists; we're elected by people who live here," said Clarke. "If I went somewhere and couldn't find parking, I would have signed this petition too."

Mayor Bob Bucher, speaking to Wilson, said he does not like to be threatened by lawsuits. "I'd rather be surprised. If you're going to sue us, sue us."

And, for good measure, the mayor added, "I don't give a damn about the Coastal Commission."

**'Quit getting so damn emotional over the parking problem for no reason at all.'**

— Councilman  
Michael Routh

His comment stemmed from the commission's ruling that the city had to obtain a coastal permit before establishing a permit program in front of Capitola Wharf. The council went ahead and approved the program anyway.

Goodwin, owner of Second Story Books, caused the hubbub last month by asking for the public hearing to discuss Capitola "elitist" parking restrictions.

Goodwin called for an immediate end to seven-day-a-week, 24-hour-a-day permit programs, saying on-street parking should not be "exclusive" to residents. Some of Capitola's programs operate only on weekends, while others run daily.

Failing to eliminate the programs, Goodwin advocated the sale of visitor permits, charging a fee for the resident-permits and giving merchants and their employees the opportunity also to buy permits. Having visitor permits for sale — like the program in Live Oak — at least would give visitors the option of paying to park on streets, she said.

Most of all, Goodwin asked the council to appoint another parking committee to work on possible changes to the program.

The only suggestion gaining any concurrence from council members concerned charging a fee for resident-permits. Graves noted the city now spends about \$60,000 a year on the program without being reimbursed.

Routh said the Capitola Village Association parking committee already was working on such a fee, along with other changes to improve parking conditions.

Goodwin told The Sentinel later that she was "disappointed and shocked" over the council's non-action. "It's obvious they don't want anybody assisting them in the decision-making process."

Many others testified during the hearing, including:

REFERENCE



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Merchants complain that the City Council gives the same impression as these signs do.

- Downtown property owner and Riverview Drive resident Nels Westman jokingly presented the council with a Capitola sign that called it a "private resort: members and guests only." Westman called seven-day-a-week permit parking "patently exclusionary."

- Cherry Avenue resident Pat Duncan supported permit parking, saying as it is now, she can't have visitors because they have no place to park. "I might as well live in outer Siberia," she said.

- Burlingame Avenue resident Cliff Mitinger maintained, "We (residents) support this town, they (merchants) don't. He said visitors park on Burlingame "making it look like a used-car lot." He advocated building a "two or three-story parking lot" downtown.

- Downtown restaurant owner Bill Kuettel, who also leases the Capitola Theater parking lot for public parking during the day, chastised merchants who complained about lack of parking. "I only have six

merchants who pay \$2 to park in my lot," he said. "If they can't afford \$2 a day, those businesses shouldn't be in business."

- Long-time resident George Teixeira advocated a return to the good old days, complete with allowing fishermen to park on the wharf. As it is now, he said he has to drive his boat down to the wharf, drive back home and walk back, which takes an hour. "I have to take two nitro's (nitroglycerin tablets for heart condition) to walk back up the hill," he said.