

Capitola parking plan runs into trouble

Capitola Village merchants are lining up against a controversial downtown parking plan that centers around the installation of 300 parking meters — a plan that last week was endorsed by the Chamber of Commerce board of directors.

More than 150 village merchants and their customers have already signed petitions against the meters, according to Joann Mckown, owner of Aries Arts, treasurer of the Capitola Village Merchant's Association and also a member of the Chamber.

She maintained the 150 signatures were gathered in only a couple hours of work and many more are expected

before a special City Council meeting on Oct. 12 to discuss all segments of the three-fold plan.

In essence, the anticipated revenue from the long-discussed parking meters, as well as a \$100 additional business license fee to downtown businesses, is expected to finance either a permanent shuttle bus parking lot and/or a fixed rail transit line.

The fixed rail line is the ultimate projection proposed by the mayor's select committee that was appointed by Mayor Ron Graves. The line would be reminiscent of the 1900s when the original Santa Cruz-Capitola trolley line operated.

Mckown termed the plan "a bit too ambitious" at this point.

She was quick to point out that the village merchants she has talked to are not against alleviating the long-standing parking problem downtown, but only the parking meter method of raising revenues.

Meters, she explained, "may kill what little off-season business we have."

"The village represents a leisure kind of shopping community," she added. "Shoppers don't have to come here, they come because of the atmosphere. With meters, they can go over to 41st Avenue and shop free."

Mckown said that village merchants have been through the "parking meter routine" at least three times in the past. Each time it has been shot down.

"The sentiment also is that meters present an image of restriction and lack of freedom. The reason we're here (village merchants) is because we have a few vestiges of the old way left," she said.

At an earlier Village Merchants Association meeting on the plan, the proposed 50 cents an hour meter charge was also attacked. Opponents maintained the fee was too high, while proponents noted it was the same fee that was currently charged for those parking on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf.

No mention of the proposed meter charge was discussed when the chamber endorsed the plan.

Mckown encouraged more revenue-making alternatives other than meters. One possibility, according to her, was raising the additional business license fee override.

Now proposed at \$100 to downtown businesses, she suggested the fee might be higher according to the size of the business.

In reality, however, without the meters there is no parking plan.

The meters are expected to generate approximately \$300,000 a year. With such guaranteed income, the city could then borrow between \$2 and \$4 million in revenue bonds to go toward the suggested transportation alternatives.

While both a permanent shuttle bus parking lot and a fixed rail line are suggested in the committee's report, the latter obviously has generated more interest.

Both utilization of the existing Southern Pacific railroad tracks or installation of another line have already been discussed. The committee has gone so far as to investigate the cost and type of rail cars that might be used, as well as the location of passenger stations.

Utilizing existing rail lines, the committee determined the project could be started within 18 months.

"I feel the whole plan is a bit too ambitious at this point," said Mckown. "We appear to be going into it very haphazardly."

The Oct. 12 council meeting will begin at 7 p.m. The public is encouraged to attend.