

CAPITOLA
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Capitola council likes 41st Avenue median strip

CAPITOLA — The City Council Thursday night moved toward installing a controversial median strip on 41st Avenue, south of Capitola Road, despite objections of no fewer than 12 business representatives.

Final approval wasn't given pending several changes in the \$250,000 41st Avenue Improvement Plan, but council members made their pro-median intentions known. The modified plan will return to the council April 11.

While the plan focuses on the landscaped center strip on 41st from Capitola Road south to Reposa Avenue, it will include the installation of signals at the Jade and Brommer streets intersections, construction of curb, gutter and sidewalks, new lights and striping for bicycle lanes.

Owners of 41st Avenue businesses — from George Ow of Kings Plaza shopping center to Harry Jenkins, developer of the soon-to-open Spa Fitness Center — came out in force to object to the median's cutting back of left-turns options for those who want to drive into their businesses. Others objected to the elimination of on-street parking. Two petitions against the plan were filed.

Many agreed with the sentiment of Dick Parker of the Capitola Suites complex, who maintained traffic on the city's busiest commercial street "ain't broken, so why fix it?"

Council members, however, sided with Public Works Director Craig French and project traffic engineer Dick Iw, both of whom stressed the median would "control traffic movements" and provide increased safety on 41st Avenue.

Besides allowing cross-traffic at the intersections of Jade/Brommer, Reposa Avenue and Melton Street, "breaks" in the medians are proposed in two spots — to serve north and southbound traffic into Kings Plaza.

Mayor Michael Routh noted that he heard "these same arguments" from business people when the city put in the medians on 41st Avenue, north of Capitola Road, across from Capitola Mall. He said

he didn't want to scrap the plan, but also conceded there were modifications needed.

Among those he suggested — and which were subsequently adopted by the rest of the council for the traffic engineer to modify — included the elimination of the southern-most proposed median between Reposa Avenue and Melton Street.

The elimination of that median would provide for left-turn access for southbound 41st Avenue traffic to the soon-to-open Spa Fitness Center, which will generate up to 3,000 new vehicle trips per day in the area. It will also return on-street parking to two businesses, Capitola Auto Parts and The Frame Studio. Neither have sufficient off-street parking.

William Powers, owner of Capitola Auto Parts, earlier told the council that 85 percent of his customers park on 41st Avenue. He maintained elimination of that on-street parking "would effectively put me out of business." Jenkins of the Spa Fitness Center told council members that if he had known left-turn access would be prohibited into his project, "I would have built some place else."

Other possible changes directed by the council include:

- The addition of a left-turn stacking lane on southbound 41st at Reposa Avenue. This would serve a planned 52,000-square-foot retail development where Shaffer's Tropical Gardens is located.
- Extension of the left-turn stacking

lane on southbound 41st at Brommer Street, which was deemed not long enough.

- Elimination of a proposed pedestrian crosswalk because of safety concerns.
 - Provide an emergency "slot" in the median facing the Santa Cruz Ambulance Co., which would allow ambulances to turn left onto northbound 41st.
 - Study the possibility of the city acquiring properties for use as bus turn-outs.
 - Pursue agreements with property owners of undeveloped parcels in the area, encouraging shared internal circulation.
- The long-planned project will be mostly paid by the federal government. According to French, the feds will pay 86 percent of the project. Work is hoped to begin in August, with completion in early October.