

Capitola has tough going on shuttle plan

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CAPITOLA — Somehow when it comes to parking in Capitola, nothing seems to go right.

A case in point occurred Thursday night as the City Council got almost nothing but flak for unveiling a preliminary plan for a 151-car beach shuttle bus parking lot near New Brighton State Beach. The park-and-ride lot is planned to house the city's successful summer program, which shuttles beach-goers into Capitola Village, helping to alleviate monumental traffic jams.

Although council members eventually approved the preliminary plan, the issue is far from over.

Approval of the preliminary plan only sets into motion the environmental review stage of the proposed parking lot. A final

plan is expected to come back to the council in four to six weeks. That final plan is to address everything from environmental questions to increased traffic congestion that is anticipated with the lot's addition.

At one point, Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan — the lone council member to vote against the preliminary plan — questioned whether the 4.6-acre parcel at McGregor Drive and Park Avenue was even appropriate for the city's park-and-ride lot. She was unsuccessful in pushing for a feasibility study to see whether visitors would use the lot.

Councilman Jerry Clarke, in no uncertain terms, told Harlan she should have raised that question last year when the council voted to spend \$465,000 on the parcel. The city is now under the gun to develop the lot in time for the fast-

approaching summer tourist season. The city will not be able to operate its temporary lot on Bay Avenue this year because of recent development there.

The parking lot would be built with federal funds, obtained by the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District. The district has already promised \$220,000 toward construction.

Among the biggest concerns voiced at the public hearing involved control of the lot to ensure shuttle bus users use it. New Brighton State Beach supervisor Jim Fry noted that the new lot — just 500 feet from the park's day-use lots — could turn into a New Brighton parking lot instead. State Parks would also come out on the losing end since walk-in visitors to New Brighton don't have to pay a fee.

Capitola Planning Commissioner Jerry White estimated that 80 percent of the lot could be New Brighton Beach users, while only 20 percent would catch the shuttle bus into downtown as the intended purpose.

Several residents in the area, specifically along New Brighton Road and Pine Tree Lane, expressed concern over the added traffic the lot would bring.

"I really don't feel it's right for the city to try to make a quick-fix of its parking problems by creating more problems for an adjoining community," said New

Brighton Road resident Rick Roseman. Another resident said his biggest concern was whether visitors to Capitola Village would ever use the lot.

Carin Mudgett, owner of the Craft Gallery downtown and a former councilwoman, however, urged the council not to delay the development of the lot. "A delay here would be unbearable on residents everywhere," she said. Mudgett added that originally she wasn't a supporter of the lot at that location, but now that the council has gone this far, it should continue.

Mayor Michael Routh pointed out that approval was only preliminary. He said he hoped the concerns raised can be addressed in the final plan.

"I don't want to be accused of creating something out there similar to our stand against Wingspread," Routh added. The Wingspread Beach development is located on the other side of New Brighton from the proposed shuttle bus lot. The city has gone on record against the visitor-serving development due to increased traffic the project would bring.

In passing the preliminary plan, the council specified points that the final plan should address. One was some sort of mechanism to control the use of the lot, and the need to investigate the possible need for turning or stacking lanes on McGregor Drive.