

Village parking fees abolished

Fees paid by Capitola Village businesses in lieu of parking spaces were abolished last night by the Capitola Planning Commission.

At the center of the debate on "in-lieu" parking fees — discussed at both the Planning Commission and the City Council level in recent months — is the fact that the fee system did nothing to create more parking in the Village.

Several officials have expressed the sentiment that the fees might discourage businessmen from remodeling. Commissioner John Elstad last night called the fees "an undue fine" on reconstruction projects in the Village.

"You might as well just ask everyone in the Village to move out and let it become a ghost town," he said.

Businesses paid \$5,000 a space and three restaurants paid a percentage of their gross income toward in-lieu parking fees.

City staff was proposing to change the restaurant fee to one which would be based on parking spaces rather than income. Other businesses would pay a fee based on construction costs and limited to two spaces.

The owners of two of the three restaurants — Zeld's and Sea Bonne — which paid a percentage of their income testified last night against the fees, calling them "arbitrary and prejudiced."

Zeld's owner John Ealy said the fees were first imposed

when Capitola's General Plan was drawn up and it was perceived there would not be enough parking. With the acquisition by the city of the Pacific Cove lot and the shuttle parking lot near New Brighton Beach, Ealy said the in-lieu fee is outdated.

The commissioners agreed, voting unanimously to eliminate the fee system. Revisions to the "parking and loading ordinance" will now go to the City Council for approval.

One item not agreed on by commissioners was whether to require covered parking in new houses.

Chairman Bill Fisher and Commissioner Elstad lost on their vote against that requirement.

Also last night, the commissioners adopted with little discussion guidelines to implement the Local Coastal Plan, which affects two-thirds of Capitola.

That means the city, rather than the state Coastal Commission, will be issuing permits for construction in the Coastal Zone.

The most significant change, planning director Susan Tupper said, is that the timeline for processing permits will be much shorter.

Along with the coastal guidelines, the commissioners approved a plan for protecting "environmentally sensitive habitats" in Capitola. Most of those regulations are already followed by the city, Tupper said.