

City looking to the past to solve its parking woes

By BOB SMITH

Capitola village has had parking problems almost since the day it was founded by F.A. Hihn, and the city is now toying with the idea trying to solve the parking problem by returning to two of the earliest forms of mass transportation — the train and the street car.

Tomorrow night, Mayor Ron Graves will present a new plan to the City Council for council reaction and the beginning of a full public debate.

The plan, drafted by a group of village merchants and property owners appointed by Graves to a "Mayor's Select Committee on Village Parking," has three major elements:

—Collection of a \$100 a year business license surcharge from each business in the village area.

—Using the proceeds from that fee to purchase 300 parking meters to be installed in the village area bounded by Depot Hill, the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, and Wharf Road-Cliff Drive.

—Using the estimated \$329,000 a year revenue from the parking meters to finance a wide range of options including the purchase of a Bay Avenue parking lot, the

continued operation of the free beach shuttle bus, or develop some entirely new form of transportation in the village. Mentioned as possibilities were diesel-powered shuttle cars on the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, a streetcar on Bay and Capitola Avenues or anything else the town wanted to consider.

If the city goes ahead with either the railroad shuttle cars or the streetcar line, it will be emulating transportation modes that were discarded decades ago in favor of the automobile.

Suntan Special passenger trains delivered thousands of visitors each year to Capitola Village.

And the city was linked at the turn of the century with Santa Cruz by a street car line. Ties from the old tracks were unearthed under the Esplanade a couple of years ago in a sewer excavation project, and pilings that supported the tracks can still be seen at low tides at Twin Lakes State Beach.

Many of the merchants who attended a special meeting of the Capitola Village Association last Thursday morning said they liked the major elements of the \$2-4 million plan, but others questioned the impact installation of parking meters

in the Village will have on business.

Graves said Capitola has had a village parking problem since the days before the automobile was invented.

"Parking is probably the single most studied issue in my 16 years in the city. We have had parking committee after parking committee to study the problem.

Those studies have come to naught, either because of council indifference or opposition from special groups.

Graves said he wanted to make one last try at solving the problem, particularly in light of the state Coastal Commission's mandate to the city to come up with a solution to the village parking and coastal access problems.

"I decided to put together a committee, not to study the problem, but to come up with some alternatives."

The city is already using a variety of measures to stretch the limited supply of on-street parking in the village. They include two-hour

parking, tough code enforcement of the time limits, and a highly successful shuttle bus running between the village, beach, and a Bay Avenue parking lot.

The whole system now depends on the shuttle bus system to keep the beachgoer from parking in the village. And that system is totally depends on the good will of a Bay Avenue landowner (currently Larry Vosti) to allow the city to temporarily use his land for the summer shuttle parking lot.

The shuttle bus carried 83,000 people last year, and is carrying even more this year. "But it only handles the beach goers," Graves said. The goal is find a system, or a combination of systems, that will appeal to not only the beach user but also the village shopper and the resident.

"The core of solving the problem is money," said City Manager Steve Burrell.

As Burrell explained the plan, the key is the imposition of a \$100 a

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(Continued from page 1) business surcharge on each village business license.

He told the merchants last week that the select committee members, who have met three times this summer, first considered an property assessment district but discarded it because they believed it would not be successful.

"So we then proposed a (\$100) business license surcharge fee that would generate \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year," Burrell said.

"There has never been a realistic mechanism for providing the seed money to do anything in the village. These funds would be restricted so that they would go into an account used only for parking, and used only in the zone of benefit (the village). Five years of the fee, Burrell said in a memo distributed during last Thursday's meeting, would cover the cost of purchasing and installing 300 meters. Parking meters sell cost approximately \$145 each, Burrell said.

Burrell figured that if the city set the meters to charge 50 cents an hour for parking and operated 10 hours a day, the potential gross would be \$548,000 for one year.

(Santa Cruz charges 25 cents for 20 minutes or 75 cents an hour, 24 hours a day, on and around its wharf, Burrell noted.)

More realistically, however, he assumed that each meter would be used 60 percent of the time, so the annual gross would be \$329,000. It would cost approximately \$25,000 to service

and maintain the meters, leaving \$300,000 to fund the alternative transportation and parking program.

Used to support a revenue bond issue, the parking meters would allow the city to borrow between \$2 and \$4 million.

Two hour parking would remain in effect so a parking meter could not be tied up all day by a single parker.

Given a reliable source of income for a parking program, Burrell said the next step would be to find a permanent solution to the village parking woes.

"The key to any alternate transportation system is the acquisition of a parking lot that will accommodate the cars that the visitors bring," Burrell said.

"The cost of available properties range in prices from \$750,000 to \$2 million. It would be possible, with the funding that the meters and the override fees would generate, to acquire even the most expensive parking lot based on the income that the fees provide."

Two million dollars is the price tag for the parcel owned by Bob Grimes at the southwest corner of Bay Avenue and the freeway.

But if the city opted for a less expensive parking lot, one in the \$750,000 range, there would probably be enough money left from a \$2 million revenue bond issue to finance some sort of rail transportation system.

Burrell believes it is possible to use a portion of the Southern Pacific line through Capitola to

move visitors and residents between satellite parking lots, perhaps at New Brighton Beach and Jade Street Park, and the village.

Another possibility is a street car line from the village to a Bay Avenue parking, although he is cautious about that idea because CALTRANS has threatened in previous years to close the Bay Avenue offramps someday.

Burrell believes it would take about six months to persuade Southern Pacific to allow use of its freight-only line through Capitola for the limited passenger service, and another 18 months to repair and upgrade the railroad tracks, build platforms or stations for passenger loading, and acquire the rolling stock.

Comments on the proposal last Thursday centered largely around the parking meters and the business license charge. Palm Court Jeweler owner Ben Dworsky 50 cents an hour is too much, and also questioned what would happen to the village residents who are now exempted from the two hour parking limit.

Woodworm owner Donna Manning said she favored the plan, particularly the \$100 fee. She said that was a far more acceptable alternative than seeing her landlord raise her rent \$25 a month in anticipation of a assessment district fee.

Mac's Patio restaurant owner Ole Juhl and Air Castle owner Jim Keene both supported the idea.