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Vehicles take advantage of the free curb parking outside Staff Of Life on Wednesday.

FREE PARKING GETS KICKED TO THE CURB

By SHANNA McCORD

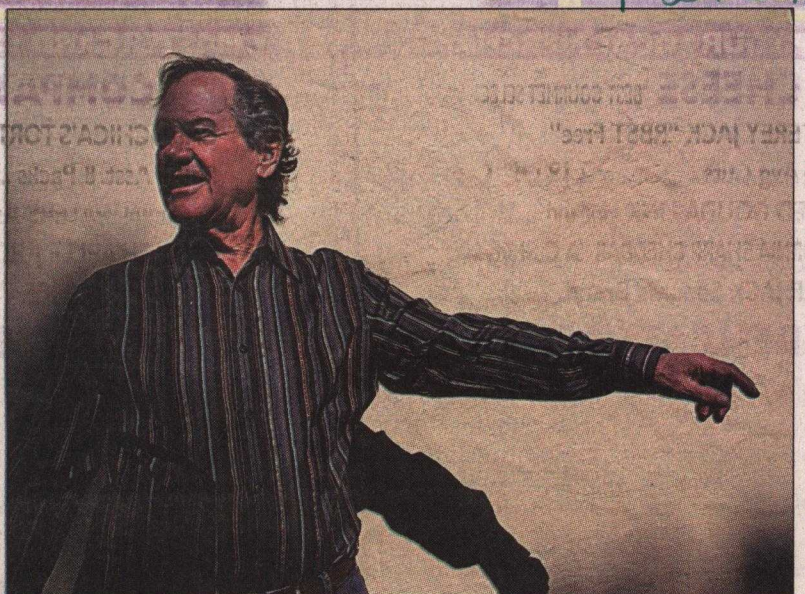
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SANTA CRUZ — Free parking along some of the Eastside's main corridors is about to disappear, as the cash-strapped city tries to button up a multimillion-dollar budget deficit.

The City Council on Tuesday unanimously approved the installation of parking meters along parts of Ocean Street, Water Street, Soquel Avenue and a few nearby residential streets in response to swelling problems for Santa Cruz's \$180 million budget and lack of places to turn for new revenue.

The council also agreed to increase the hourly parking meter rate in the beach area to \$1.50.

Santa Cruz Public Works officials expect to have the Eastside meters up and running by April.



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Gary Bascou, owner of Staff Of Life, says the city's plan to install parking meters outside his business will put him at a disadvantage with Whole Foods, which plans to open a store nearby with a large free parking lot.

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METER

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Some business owners fear they'll lose customers who steer away from areas where they have to pay to park, and instead opt for stores with free lots.

Staff of Life owner Gary Bascou, who has run his natural food store at Water Street and Morrissey since 1971, says many of his customers park along the spots available at the curb in front and pop inside for groceries.

He called the move by Public Works "callous" toward small, locally-owned businesses, especially as Whole Foods prepares to open a store on Soquel Avenue with a large, free parking lot.

"I don't want to penalize my shoppers," Bascou said. "This could be another thorn in their side."

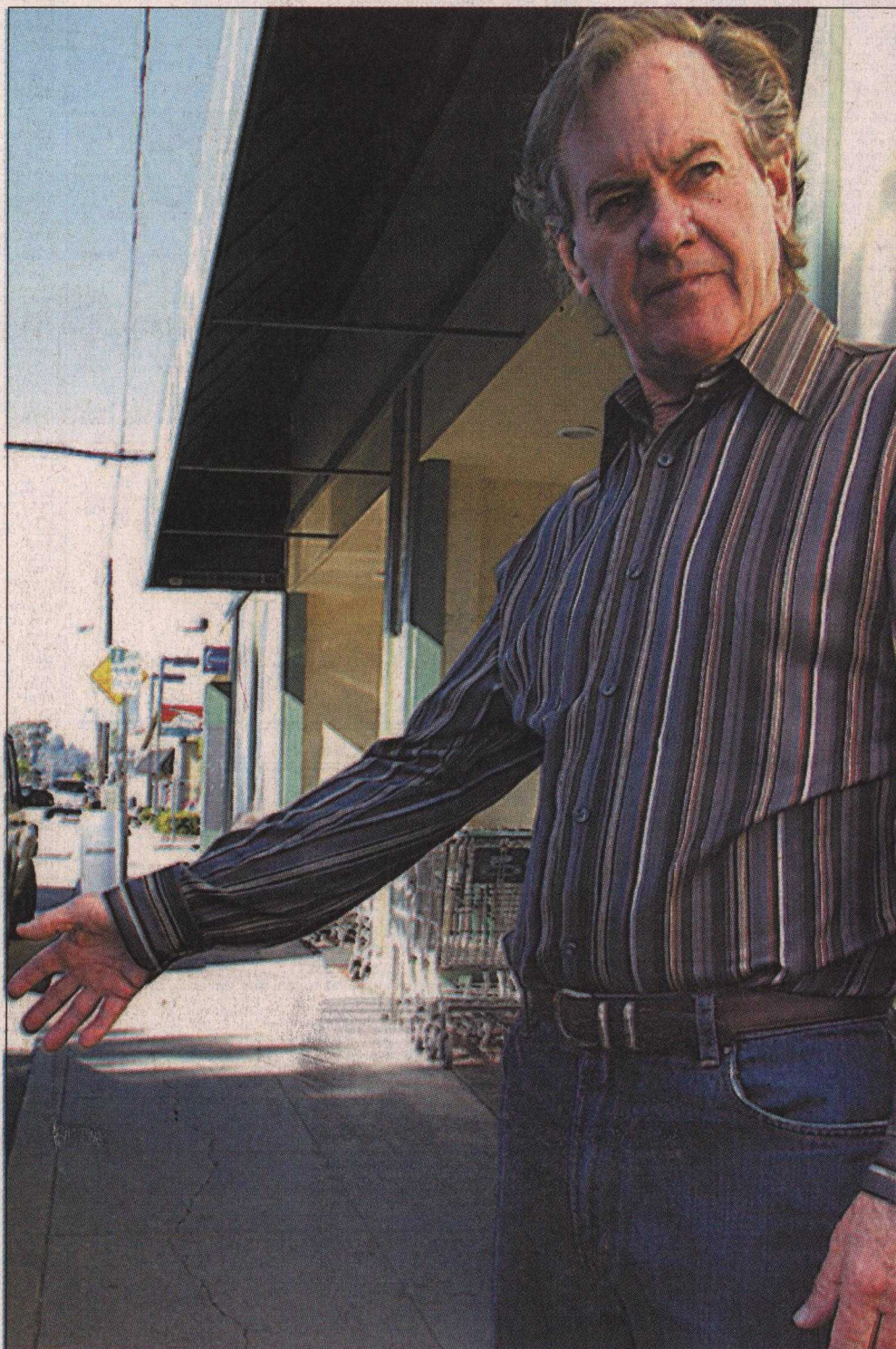
"I understand the crisis the city is going through, but I don't want meters around my store."

Several dozen new meters, with a total price tag of \$215,000, are estimated to plug an additional \$235,000 a year in Santa Cruz's general fund, which mostly pays for police, fire and parks and recreation.

The first year of operating the meters is only expected to cover the cost of buying the meters and enforcing the time limits, Public Works Director Mark Dettle said.

The higher parking fees in the beach area could boost the city's bottom line by \$115,000 a year.

While meter fees and parking citations amount to a fraction of Santa Cruz's financial problems, city leaders say every new source of money or cut to services and personnel, no



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Staff Of Life owner Gary Bascou shares his frustration about new parking meters that will go outside his business.

matter what size, adds up to help the bigger picture.

"We need to put together a

package that leads to \$7 million," Councilwoman Lynn

Robinson said. "There's no

one piece to take it from. This will make a difference."