



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published January 20th, 2010

## Wrestling with the Downtown Parking Problem

By Cathy Tyson

Discussions continue on the Downtown Specific Plan; the Planning Commission took on Parking at last week's meeting. Talk focused on introducing and making recommendations toward a comprehensive parking strategy. "Right now in Lafayette there are approximately 6,300 off-street parking spaces and 650 on-street spaces," said Niroop Srivatsa, Planning & Building Services Manager. In addition, she noted that four out of five employees in Lafayette drive to work alone. That was the major theme of the evening - that employee parking is a big problem. If more employees found alternate parking spots, then spaces in front of retail establishments would be available for customers.

"The Specific Plan has a comprehensive section about parking that identifies the target zone for a parking facility. The Plan also identifies additional parking as funding priority. But the Specific Plan's intent, given its 20-year time frame, is to provide the policy framework for a future strategy," said Ann Merideth, Community Development Director.

City staff feel that in order to develop an effective parking strategy, a fair amount of data on existing parking is needed - everything from rates, to parking occupancy to number of employees who work downtown.

"Only after this data is collected and analyzed can the City begin to understand the real and perceived parking problems in the downtown core and develop effective ways to meet the parking needs of the businesses, employees, residents and patrons," noted a January 7, 2010, Staff Report. "The preparation of a comprehensive parking strategy is critical to the future success of the downtown."

Staff took a look at how other cities handle parking. Danville has cheaper parking a few blocks away from their downtown core. Redwood City allows for up to four hours at a meter.

Guest speaker Bob Powers, member of the Walnut Creek Downtown Parking Task Force and owner of a number of parking facilities in Walnut Creek, said enforcement and time limits are the only way to control parking. "People are lazy and cheap - that's the conclusion I've come to." Meaning people don't want to walk too far and they don't want to pay too much.

Larry Blodgett, who joked he is keenly aware of the issue after receiving a \$25 parking ticket on the Library's opening day said, "The City should consider leasing vacant lots - a potential source of income for Lafayette. I'd like employee permit parking."

"Real or perceived - there is a parking problem in Lafayette. I encourage the City to buy or potentially lease property. We agree that street parking is essential," said Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce. Erling Horn, former City Council member and an ex Parking Commissioner, suggested the city re-establish a Parking Commission/Task Force.

The Planning Commissioners all agreed that the city obviously has a problem. "Whole Foods will put another burden on parking in the center of town," said Commissioner Karen Maggio, "we have to do this now." She also recommended that Lafayette should make efficient use of shared parking. Vice Chair Patricia Curtin-Tinley supported forming a Parking Commission or Task Force.

Chair Thomas Chastain summed up the current state of the Parking discussion, "I think it's irresponsible not to have some strategy toward a solution, but I'm not sure how to get there."

Reach the reporter at: [cathy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA