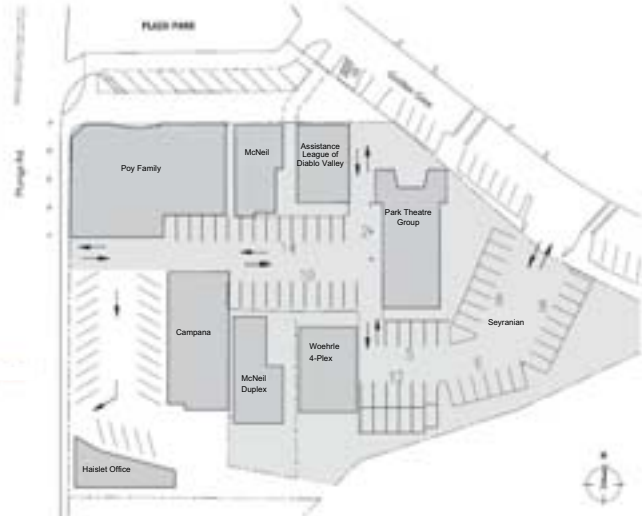


Proposed Parking Solution for Theater and Beyond

Who doesn't like ice cream?

By Cathy Tyson



Proposed Consolidated Parking Plan that links rear parking areas behind Plaza Way businesses and the Park Theater, with access via Golden Gate Way and Moraga Road. Graphic provided

It was more than just the holiday spirit in the air for the Fenton's love fest at a recent City Council meeting. Supporters young and old came out to encourage the City Council to find a way to solve the parking dilemma facing the historic eatery that would like to expand into the Park Theater.

In July the City got the ball rolling in response to requests from Fenton's, the Park (Theater) Development Group and the Poy family for relief from the parking requirements along Plaza Way. The parcel owned by the Poy family houses Squirrel Coffee Shop, Plaza Way Tailor, and formerly Handlebar Toys, A-1 Photo lab, and the Non-Conformist Boutique. A subcommittee was formed to look into solutions.

Meeting once a week for two months, the subcommittee sought to address parking and circulation issues while respecting the historical importance of the area. Although the lack of parking in Lafayette is no secret, the Park Theater and the block of shops along Plaza Way – from Squirrels to the Wayside Inn – has been around since before the advent of the automobile. Presumably there was adequate parking for Pony Express horses back when the mail service stopped in Lafayette during the 1860's, but not so much now for SUV's and mini-vans.

"The properties on Plaza Way do not now and never have provided the parking spaces required by code," according to a December 12 staff report.

The subcommittee recommended a two-fold approach: recognizing the unique character of Plaza Way and creating a new historical overlay just for that block that would be completely voluntary. Property owners will be able to get certain concessions from the City in exchange for: updating facades along Plaza way, and constructing parking in the rear of the property consistent with the Consolidated Parking plan, requiring employees to park off-site and finally granting an easement to the City over driveways and parking areas.

To hold up their end of the bargain, the City will design and develop a Consolidated Parking Plan for properties in the Overlay and reduce parking requirements for restaurants and more. For all the details, see lengthy staff report available on the city's website.

Of the six property owners, most had participated in the subcommittee meetings and as of mid- December, four of the six were agreeable to the proposal; two had no development plans and voiced concerns.

City Council members unanimously approved the request for \$40,000 to complete the next steps for the proposed project that include completing Plaza Way design guidelines, obtaining a survey of the properties and creating a formal Vision Consolidated Parking Plan Map. "We've got a real good start on a solution - we could have a vibrant area if we can put these parcels together," said Council Member Mike Anderson.

Despite giggles, sisters Kayli and Sierra Harley, ages seven and ten, who came to the podium to state their case, couldn't be happier. They feel a neighborhood Fenton's is a good place to eat and a terrific place for a birthday party, way closer than Oakland.

Lafayette matriarch Joan Bruzzone also offered encouragement to the City Council, "I have to tell you about romance, sixty years ago I had my first date with my future husband Russ at Fenton's. You could be responsible for somebody else's romance."

If all goes well, The Park Theater Group has proposed keeping and improving the front façade of the theater, allowing outdoor dining on the front patio and installing windows on both sides of the building, transforming the historic theater into a 4,700 square foot restaurant with 4,000 square feet of office space on the upper floor. The Poy family owns six tenant spaces; they propose a mixture of retail and restaurant uses and restoring the front facades to emphasize Lafayette's small town ambiance.



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