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Improving Downtown Parking in Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Downtown Orinda parking can prove difficult on busy Friday nights. Photo Ohlen Alexander

get their plan on the Orinda City Council's agenda.

"We have divided the problem into three categories: freeing space in the underground structure at Theatre Square; finding ways for employees to park away from storefronts and without risking tickets; and solving the congestion due to BART and the rideshare/casual carpool," says Kattenburg.

The group studied why the underground parking structure was often so full. "We learned that one third of the parking, about 130 cars, was used by people who neither shop nor work in Orinda. They rent spaces at \$10 a day and use them for rideshare or BART parking," said Kattenburg. "We asked the management of the parking garage to raise the rates of the spaces and to change their policy to rent space only to people who lease in Theatre Square." Kattenburg reported that 60 spaces were freed as a result of their negotiation. "The garage stopped overflowing at lunchtime; it's been a great success," he adds.

Employee parking is where the Chamber committee needs the city's approval. "We have researched what other municipalities do and we've come up with a plan that will help everyone," says the architect. "Employers would buy monthly permits for their employees so they can park in streets such as Bates and Davis, Northwood or Southwood free for eight hours." The monthly cost would be minimal and would cover the cost to the city.

"It would encourage employees to park somewhere other than in front of the stores and would give them peace of mind," he adds.

Kattenburg says he presented his plan to city staff in July and was still waiting to get a City Council hearing date. According to the group's calculation, approximately 75 permits would be needed per year.

The last and most difficult issue is BART and the rideshare zone. "It's a real problem for our communities," says Moraga resident Anita Wood. "If I arrive at BART after 7:40 (a.m.) it's likely that there won't be parking available." Wood, who works in San Francisco, often drives to the Oakland West BART station to find parking. "By the time I arrive, there is no parking there either," she says, "but across the street there's a paying lot where I can leave my car."

Kattenburg says his group has talked to council member Amy Worth who is knowledgeable on these issues and also talked to BART. "We were told by BART that they refused to add parking space to Orinda and Lafayette because it would attract drivers from more eastern municipalities to park there." Kattenburg adds that the group will not give up talking to BART and may propose 'local drivers' zones, so Orindans and Moragans can find a space after 8 a.m.

According to Kattenburg, the rideshare/casual carpool should be moved to another place with close parking. "We've been working with Orinda Planning Intern Shama Khan who initiated contacts with the churches that have large parking lots on Moraga Way," says Kattenburg. "The idea would be to use these spaces during the week for meeting points for the ride-share, or even run a BART shuttle from there to the station." Kattenburg says the discussions are preliminary, but he's hopeful it will come to fruition.

"All we are doing," says Kattenburg, "is trying to keep pressure out of the downtown area."

Parking around Orinda's Theatre Square has become more and more congested. Local patrons and employees drive in circles in the downtown area trying to find a place to park that won't end in a ticket, and BART riders who have searched for illusive spaces in the Orinda BART parking lot often venture back downtown for a spot.

"Our patients really don't have any place to park and they have to drive around the block several times in order to find a spot," says Cathy McGee, business manager for Dr. Jerry Gelbart at 11 Moraga Way in Orinda. Jerry Flank, who used to work across the street from Gelbart remembers how he used to get parking tickets, even when parking in the four-hour zone. "It is hard for employees, too," he says. "You need to keep an eye on the clock or pay expensive rates to park in the Theatre Square parking lot."

Fortunately, parking is Rick Kattenburg's baby. The Orinda architect does not see the issue from an esthetic perspective, but from a very practical point of view as Chamber of Commerce president. Kattenburg, along with fellow Chamber members Victor Ivry and Richard Westin, formed a task force to delve into the problem and to suggest solutions; they are now actively lobbying the city to



Rick Kattenburg in front of his car, parked in the back of his office on Moraga Way. Photo Sophie Braccini

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