

Published September 24th, 2014

Should the City Charge for Parking?

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

With La Fiesta Square about to install parking meters, city leaders expressed concern early this month about the overall parking situation downtown and the possibility of metering spaces in public lots in Lafayette. The all-volunteer Parking Ordinance Committee did its homework on the matter and suggested some options. However, because Lafayette City Council members wanted to bring business owners in on the discussion and give the Lafayette school board time to develop a firm picture of the district's needs, a decision about meters was continued until the Sept. 22 council meeting.

Up for discussion is the private lease over half of the public lot at Uncle Yu's, the lot at the old library, the newest of the city-owned lots at 949 Moraga Road, and the lot at the gazebo on Golden Gate Way.

Each lot has a unique set of restrictions and encumbrances. For example, the eastern half of the Uncle Yu's lot is public while the western side is for Uncle Yu's customers; the restaurant leases the spaces for a monthly fee. The entire 21-space lot at the gazebo is currently leased to private businesses during business hours.

The old library hasn't been designated - but many drivers use the parking lot, especially parents picking up and dropping off students. A recommendation on the building's future use was also slated to be on this week's council agenda - it's likely to impact the currently free parking there.

Across the street from the old library is a parcel the city purchased, at 949 Moraga Road, using revenue from existing parking meters earmarked to provide free parking.

Historically the city has leased spaces within public lots to businesses, and reserved those spots for customers usually because the businesses were unable to meet the parking requirements imposed by the city.

When parking meters were first installed roughly 20 years ago, it was controversial. To sweeten the deal at that time, the city made an oral agreement with the business community that fees charged for on-street parking would be used to buy free off-street parking.

Fee or free? The Parking Ordinance Committee was asked to make recommendations. "The committee agrees that the time has come to charge for public off street parking," noted the staff report prepared by police chief Eric Christensen, planning and building services director Niroop Srivatsa, and city engineer Tony Coe. Their report also explained that not all lots serve the same purpose and therefore should be assessed and priced based on the type and duration of usage.

Recommendations include a suggested maximum of four hours of parking at the old library at \$1 per hour; if approved, this could bring in \$44,500 annually after paying for meter installation.

The 949 Moraga Road lot is used by many as all day parking. It was suggested the city invest in credit card meters with a starting price of \$2 per day to park at this lot. Unfortunately the discussion about the fate of these lots took place after press deadline. Curious residents can check out what happened at <http://www.ci.lafayette.ca.us/index.aspx?page=350>.

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