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Orinda City Council tweaks accessible parking in Theatre District

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council took a look at existing accessible public parking in the Theatre District as a matter initiated on Oct. 3, and, as a result, decided to try to eliminate one accessible space on Bryant Way and attempt to add another on Moraga Way. The issue was brought to the council's attention on Sept. 5 by a member of the public. The staff report was presented to the council by Scott Christie, Director of Public Works.

In the past, the Theatre District had a total of five accessible parking spaces. Accessible parking spaces are those that are designed to make parking easier under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and have to meet certain requirements under the act. For example, accessible parking spaces must be at least 96 inches wide with a 60-inch-wide access aisle.

Some of Orinda's public accessible parking spaces did not meet all of the requirements. For example, there was an accessible space in front of the building that now houses Peet's Coffee and Nation's Hamburgers. But the space wasn't conforming because it did not have the required access aisle, so the city removed it, following a claim and settled litigation. Similar reasoning applied to the removal of another accessible parking space near 39 Moraga Way. Both spaces were removed in 2016.

Currently, there is an accessible parking space on Bryant Way, along the north side of Theatre Square. It is a parallel parking space, and does not have an access aisle. Behind the space there is a driveway, which can be used for access but might present a dangerous conflict between use for access for a disabled person and vehicular access. For this reason, the city council decided that it would be better to convert this space to a regular parking space.

To avoid reducing the total number of public accessible parking spaces in the Theatre District, the council would like staff to try to find another place where a fully compliant accessible parking space can be placed, understanding that to create an accessible parking space will mean taking up two parking spaces: one for the accessible parking space and another for the access aisle.

There are currently 584 off-street parking spaces in the Theatre District, of which 20 are accessible, representing 3% of the spaces. The minimum requirement under the ADA is 2%, which would be only 12 parking spaces.

As for on-street parking, there is a total of 97 spaces, three of which are accessible, representing 3%. Much of the accessible parking in the Theatre District is located in private parking lots, for which the city is not responsible.

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