

Published October 7th, 2015

Is Parking Relief in Sight?

By Cathy Tyson



On a sunny Thursday, parking spots at La Fiesta Square were available for customers; more meters may be coming to privately owned parking lots in the future. Photo C. Tyson

of Solutions." Topping the list of 27 specific items: offer residents and employees parking permits.

In addition, they concluded that Lafayette has a role to play to help make more parking available and to provide incentives, but the city does not have a responsibility to build new parking lots by itself.

Circulation commissioner Bill Loudon, a parking committee volunteer, noted that Berkeley has tiered parking, with value and premium lots offering cheaper and more expensive spaces, depending on location.

Installing sensors to communicate availability and location of spots via smart phones was called the "way of the future" by planning commissioner Tom Chastain, also a committee volunteer.

"Is smart meter technology available for existing parking meters?" asked council member Traci Reilly. She wanted to know if adjustable pricing could be increased during peak periods to recognize the value of a parking spot.

Laboring diligently, parking committee volunteers working on the Downtown Parking Management Strategy are in the final stages of preparing a plan to provide solutions and provided an update at the Sept. 28 Lafayette City Council meeting.

With parking rules in place since 1977, there have been revisions over the years, but no major update. Life, and definitely parking in Lafayette, has changed significantly in the last 38 years.

The committee comprehensively reviewed the problem, doing extensive outreach, and analyzed the 10,000 on- and off-street spaces in the downtown area and how they are used.

Looking at what they call the Parking Predicament, the group concluded "the problem is not how much parking the downtown core contains; it's where the parking is located, how accessible it is and how it is regulated or restricted."

Several parking management strategies already in use were evaluated. The most recent is the controversial parking meters installed on private parking lots at La Fiesta Square. Spaces now turn over more quickly, and drivers can usually find a space, but it is no longer free. The Lafayette Mercantile is a good example of public-private cooperation. Some city money was used to fund the construction of the parking garage, which allows free evening and weekend parking. Spaces along Mt. Diablo Boulevard are now metered; drivers can choose to pay for a spot close by or park further out for free.

Taking in an array of issues like short-term and long-term parkers, prohibitively expensive parking in-lieu fees, utilization of separated but adjacent private lots, BART parking and more, the committee came up with what they call "a Toolbox

City leaders were encouraged that they saw a number of items in the toolbox that can be done at a fairly reasonable cost while still keeping a sense of urgency.

Another conclusion: the business community is also part of the solution. "Businesses need to understand that this is a shared resource," said Chastain, explaining that having easy access to parking for customers will make their business better. He was referring to one example of many in the downtown area; in the parking lot behind Postino restaurant, there are other directly adjacent lots behind neighboring El Jarro and the Prive and Company Jewelers, but they are separated by fencing.

"It's hard for us to require them (property owners) to do something new," cautioned mayor Brandt Andersson. Potential city funded incentives might pave the way.

Calling the meters at La Fiesta Square "game changing," Loudon sees more groups of property owners putting in meters together, as a way to open up small pockets of parking.

To see the entire report, go to www.lovelafayette.org, click on public meetings and go to the City Council staff report for the Sept. 28 meeting.

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