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A VIEW FROM HARBOR STREET

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Puzzling over the Future

By David Buckingham, City Manager



Puzzles are fun, and hard. Planning for, and putting together, the pieces of the Morro Bay future puzzle requires assessing not only what is happening today, but looking out three to five years at what might be.

The Big Parking Picture. When considering parking, many of us think primarily about how easy or hard it is to find a spot close to where we want to end up. The City continues to take steps to increase the number of parking spaces – especially in our business and tourist districts. For example, we recently changed the parking on a block of Market Avenue (near the Sun Bulletin Building) from parallel parking to perpendicular parking. This action, implementing a specific plan approved by the Planning Commission and City Council, increased the number of parking spaces on that block by 12 from 24 to 38.

The City has added about 160 parking spaces at the “Triangle Lot,” the dirt lot adjacent to the power plant near the Surf Street stairs, and about another 40 parking spaces at the now-public parking lot at Market and Pacific streets. Both of these temporary - and possibly permanent - additions to parking are important as the City considers other revitalization activities in the downtown and on the waterfront.

One City interest, and a requirement we have from the California Coastal Commission, is to provide and maintain adequate access, including parking, to our coast and bay. This means if parking is removed from one location, additional parking must be added to protect coastal access. Since the community is considering a number of projects that could impact parking near the waterfront, we working now to add parking to ensure the total number of spaces near the waterfront, at minimum stays, constant. Projects under consideration include an “Embarcadero Promenade” – widening the existing sidewalk from five feet to 13 feet on the bay side of the Embarcadero by expanding the sidewalk into the existing parallel parking lane. Another early-stage idea is a Centennial Parkway revitalization concept. This could affect parking on the street-end across the Embarcadero, and other development activities as some of the oldest buildings on the waterfront are planned for reconstruction in the next few years.

Marine Services Facility/Boatyard: The City is continuing our effort to assess the feasibility of developing a marine services facility to serve local commercial fishermen and recreational boaters and those transiting the California coast. Such a facility would likely include a large

haul-out on the bay and a land-side maintenance facility with space for some boat storage. It would fill the existing gap between Monterey and Santa Barbara for such comprehensive services. We are now halfway through the process to determine if a boatyard may be feasible and viable in Morro Bay. A market analysis, completed last year as an initial step determined that there is a measurable market for such services in Morro Bay. We've just completed an interim step to evaluate the two acre Triangle Lot as a possible boatyard site, and to begin to assess the impacts on the waterfront and parking. This year, we will conduct a feasibility study – an assessment of practicality – a step that will help determine if the proposed project is economically viable. Should this process conclude the boatyard is both viable and feasible, at that location or possibly another, the City could begin what would be a long process of planning and working with potential investors and developers. The Harbor Advisory Board, Planning Commission and City Council are all actively engaged in this process – a long one, but one that could result in a great new service, and economic development opportunity in Morro Bay.

Maritime Museum. The City is also continuing, and formalizing, our partnership with the non-profit Central Coast Maritime Museum Association (CCMMA). The CCMMA is collecting and maintaining historical maritime artifacts, including the several boats already on display near the “triangle lot.” Those boats should be moved to the newly prepared area adjacent to the Triangle Lot this year, re-opening the parking spaces the boats currently sit on. The CCMMA is also making near term plans, and raising funds, for a small museum building that may also be situated in that area to house smaller artifacts and provide an additional interesting activity in Morro Bay.

Each piece of our community puzzle above requires thinking and planning, and each requires great input from the public. We look forward to receiving input in many venues. Attend the Harbor Advisory Board and Planning Commission meetings, talk to commission members and City Council members, and communicate directly with City staff. Reach me at dbuckingham@morrobayca.gov and I look forward to hearing from you.

Note: This editorial first appeared in Bay News on February 11, 2016.