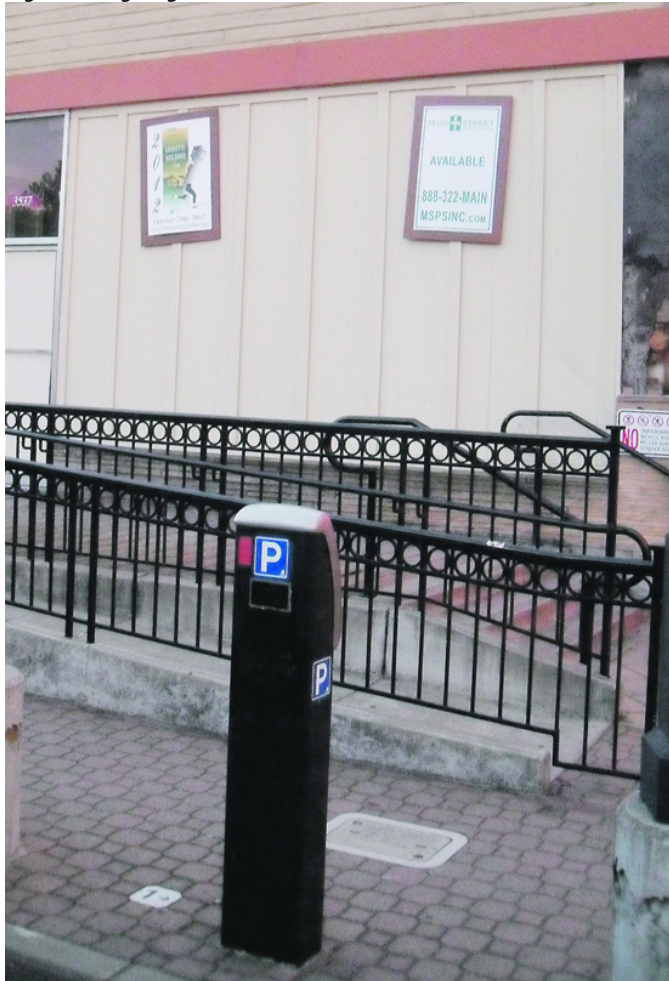


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## Parking Solution in the Works for Plaza Way

By Cathy Tyson



One of the few parking spaces available for Plaza Way merchants. If approved by the City, the Plaza Way Overlay would relax parking standards in this small historic block. Photo Cathy Tyson

Square, the Mercantile Building, even the shopping area across the street that runs from Safeway to Whole Foods, flourish.

The Plaza Way subcommittee came to some important conclusions. "If the city wishes to preserve Plaza Way's historical character and stimulate the right type of development it must treat the area differently...strict application of modern zoning and parking regulations make the properties non-viable, as a result, will eventually destroy its quintessential character," states the staff report prepared for the joint meeting.

Property owners who opt in to the proposed Overlay District will be required to update buildings, construct parking in the rear of the property and grant an easement over driveways and public parking areas, while in return the City will design and develop a consolidated parking plan and reduce the parking requirement from 1 space for every 45 square feet of dining area to 1 space for every 100 square feet of dining space.

Although the three Creeks Committee members in attendance gave a mixed review to the proposal- there's a creek that forms the southern border of the area- the Circulation Commission seems generally more in favor, with Bill Loudon commenting, "This is really exciting. This would be a tremendous help, I whole-heartedly support it." No decision was made, but discussion will continue at the next meeting of the Planning Commission, September 17.

"This can really be the jewel of the city," said Gary Patterson from the Park Theater Group; he's looking forward to making headway after purchasing the property with other investors seven years ago. The issue for the theater and other Plaza Way businesses is their lack of parking. Over the years the Park Theater Group scoured the area, looking into purchasing nearby properties for additional parking, but came up empty.

He's not the only one looking for relief; the Poy Family, who owns Squirrels Coffee Shop and two closed retail spaces next door, are also anxious to address the parking situation. The City listened, and after roughly a year of meetings with property owners, the Plaza Way Overlay District is in its final stages. It would overlay the nine parcels from the Campana building to Squirrels to the Park Theater and would be optional for property owners. The key challenge has been getting seven landlords to agree on a way to reconfigure the rear parking area to improve circulation and optimize the number of parking spaces available.

Recently the Planning Commission, along with representatives from the Creeks Committee and the Circulation Commission, met to discuss the four "visions" that had been crafted to address parking for that area. Drawing on information gleaned from a year's worth of Plaza Way Subcommittee meetings and with a clear understanding of who is opting in, and who is opting out, and who is on the fence, City staff have created a plan that can be phased in, if and when land owners buy into the concept.

Currently there are fences and a shed that delineate property lines, chopping up available real estate behind the shops. Over time, the hope is that all the property owners will opt in to create a public/private parking partnership that will ultimately bring more customers to those businesses and be self sustainable, via parking meter revenue.

The block has character and cultural significance, but with a number of storefronts shuttered it seems to be dying on the vine-while other commercial areas like La Fiesta

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