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Propane-only advocate halts beach fire rules

By MARY SCHLEY

CITY OFFICIALS may have thought they were in the clear to begin enforcing them, but Richard Flower brought the city's updated rules for beach fires to a screeching halt when he faxed a document to the Santa Cruz office of the California Coastal Commission at 4:52 Wednesday afternoon — just eight minutes before the deadline.

His fax was an appeal of the city council's latest rules for beach fires, and means the commission will be the one to decide whether to let the updated rules go into effect. On June 30, the city council OK'd 12 wood-burning fire pits on the beach south of Eighth Avenue 75 feet from the bluffs, as well as unlimited propane fires 25 feet from the bluffs, between 4 and 10 p.m. daily.

'Ignores science'

But Flower said that plan, which was designed to reduce the amount of wood smoke from beach fires and stop the

charcoal from darkening the sand, while still allowing the tradition of wood fires to continue, "ignores science, endangers health, prevents access, and degrades the environment."

Dangerous?

The program runs counter to the city's coastal land use policies, according to Flower, and is dangerous.

"Wood burning releases carcinogenic, toxic and dangerous particulate matter into the air. The reality is that Carmel Beach is all of our mutual air, not to be controlled by bad public policy, by ill informed individuals who disregard science and health and access for all," he wrote. "The council's blatant disregard for the community is shocking, since they know that they are preventing people from accessing the beach for health reasons."

The propane-only program that was being pushed by former Mayor Jason Burnett and former councilman Ken Talmage, and had the support of some coastal commissioners, was disliked by the coastal commission's staff and a couple of the council members. Flower said it would have increased beach access by eliminating wood smoke, and would have put an end to having the sand dirtied with charcoal.

In December 2015, commissioners rejected the coastal staff's recommendations for wood-burning fires "and encouraged Carmel to create a propane-only program that could potentially be a model for other communities in California, to reduce and eliminate wood smoke," he wrote.

While city officials have said they sought a compromise in allowing a small number of beach fires for the people who have passionately stated their desire to retain that century-old tradition in at least some form, Flower said allowing any wood fires at all deprives a certain segment of the population access to the beach, such as people with asthma, heart conditions or other maladies.

"We have heard testimony from adults

See **FIRES** page 11A

State extends river pumping deadline

By CHRIS COUNTS

MONTEREY PENINSULA water customers can breathe a sigh of relief after the State Water Resources Control Board this week granted Cal Am a five-year extension to stop diverting most of their drinking water supply from the Carmel River.

Without the extension, which was announced July 19, Cal Am could have been forced to sharply curtail its pumping from the river by the end of this year, stoking fears of water rationing and a major hit to the local economy. But now local officials have until 2021 to complete a desal or other water supply project — and one in the works is expected to be ready to deliver water in 2020.

In 1995, the state water board ruled that Cal Am was illegally diverting more than 7,500 acre-feet (about 2.5 billion gallons) a year from the Carmel River — an order which had the effect of prohibiting almost all new water hookups in the Monterey Peninsula, bringing a halt to new development.

Fourteen years later, the state agency decided to get serious about enforcing the 1995 cutback order, and gave local officials six years to come up with a replacement water project — a deadline that was due to expire at the end of this year.

But the effort to build a desalination plant has been plagued by lawsuits and delays, prompting officials to request the extension, while also noting all the work that's been done toward developing the new water supply.

'Significant progress'

In announcing the extension, state officials acknowledged the work that has been done to come up with an alternative to pumping from the Carmel River.

"This action recognizes significant progress in collaborative projects to augment river flows and gives Cal-Am and the community organizations working on other large-scale

See **ORDER** page 10A

Plaza to get major facelift



RENDERING/BELLI ARCHITECTURAL GROUP

A rendering shows how the new stairs in the overhauled courtyard in Carmel Plaza will appear, complete with landscaping (transparent people not included). The city approved the Plaza plans last week. See story page 6A.

P.G. ADMISSION TAX HEADED TO BALLOT

■ Biz license hike voted down

By MARY SCHLEY

DESPITE VEHEMENT opposition from the public, a split Pacific Grove City Council voted Tuesday night to ask voters if they want to add a 5 percent tax to admission to all sorts of events and activities taking in the city, from admission to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, to movies at Lighthouse Cinema, seats at sporting events, and participation in fundraisers.

But a proposal to float a ballot measure increasing the fee for business licenses in the city failed by a 2-5 vote.

During a lengthy July 20 council meeting, Mayor Bill Kampe combined the two potential ballot measures into a single public hearing, which elicited more than an hour of comments — mostly from people who didn't like either idea.

■ A fee on tickets

While past estimates put possible revenues from an admission tax at around \$750,000 a year, city manager Ben Harvey told the council it could actually generate more than \$4 million a year for the general fund, most of which would come from taxing the aquarium's ticket sales and memberships. (Admission to the aquarium, which is visited by more than a million people every year, is \$50 for adults and \$30 for kids.) Also taxed would be rounds of golf and memberships at the

See **TAXES** page 18A

Here's a way to limit some of the traffic in Big Sur: let 'em drive laptops

By ELAINE HESSER

GOOGLE MAPS' Street View feature can be a lot of fun — and useful. When the project was launched, pretty much all the images came from Google's cars, which have multiple cameras mounted on top of them to capture 360-degree images of different areas as they drive along city streets. You may have even seen one traveling around the Monterey Peninsula a few years back.

Through some sort of Google voodoo, those images are loaded into a part of its map program that lets users plop themselves down virtually into a neighborhood and simulate walking or driving around.

Within the last few years, Google's liberated some of the cameras from the cars and strapped them onto people, then sent them hiking and on bicycle rides — including in some of Monterey County's most scenic locales. Though it wasn't necessary here, there's also been at least one case of a camel-cam.

Even a partial list of places you can go without leaving your favorite Wi-Fi spot is impressive. There are dozens of trails the intrepid Googlers recorded around the county for your viewing pleasure.

Garland in summer can be a little warm, but the online trek includes many of the park's trails, in some places complete with a frolicking dog. In Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, navigating the online experience is a little tricky, but

See **TREKS** page 15A

From Garrapata State Park (below) to Garland park and many other spots in Monterey County, Google's Trekker operators (right) hauled around cameras so you don't have to.

