

The Carmel Pine Cone

Volume 107 No. 20

www.carmelpinecone.com

May 14-20, 2021

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City envisions paid parking downtown, at beach



PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

In 2014, the City of Carmel experimented with paid parking on Ocean Avenue. Payment was made at kiosks which, during the tryout period at least, required a "parking ambassador" to explain how the machines worked.

■ Jason Burnett council tried in 2014

By MARY SCHLEY

THE CITY should get moving on its plans to charge beachgoers to park in the Del Mar lot at the foot of Ocean Avenue, the city council told planning director Brandon Swanson last week, because the California Coastal Commission will have to approve it — and that will take awhile.

Council members also said they want to look at implementing paid parking throughout downtown, not just on Ocean Avenue between Junipero and Monte Verde, as Swanson initially proposed.

During his update to the council May 3, Swanson said he also plans to meet with consultants to learn about new parking technologies "that will have the least impact on the village character while providing the city the best option for use," and he wants to develop revenue estimates.

And based on direction given by the council in March, Swanson said he'll work on developing a way for residents to use their parking permits in the commercial area, and a permit program for construction vehicles in the residential areas — where people complain they take up space and create problems on some of the more narrow but busy streets.

While council members had suggested reinstalling paid parking in the north lot at Sunset Center and putting it in

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Council sets deadlines for removing parklets

By MARY SCHLEY

ALL TABLES and chairs have to be off downtown sidewalks by June 1, the city council decided last week. It also set deadlines for tasting rooms and restaurants to remove their outdoor dining areas on public property, but with much more lead time — and only when indoor dining reaches its full pre-pandemic capacity. And if businesses are still operating under coronavirus restrictions come Dec. 31, the city council will decide then whether to let them carry on or end the parklet program.

At the May 4 meeting, planning director Brandon Swanson reminded the council that the 60-plus permits issued by the city for tasting rooms, restaurants, coffee shops and bars to set up tables and chairs in parking spaces and on the sidewalk were set to expire May 31. Meanwhile, Gov. Gavin Newsom has designated June 15 as the date when almost all pandemic-related limits on businesses and public gatherings will end, though he also said businesses will still have to operate with "commonsense risk-reduction measures in place."

Gone before Car Week?

Bringing up the particulars of the city's shutdown rules, Swanson took the position that tasting rooms are, in effect, retail stores which can already operate at full capacity, so they should get their outdoor seating areas out of the street by the end of May. Restaurants, meanwhile, should have until July 31 to do so, assuming the mid-June change means a return to 100 percent indoor capacity. Removing parklets before August would "greatly reduce the risk of serious injury or death" during Car Week, "when the village sees a massive influx of visitor and vehicular traffic," Swanson suggested.

The city received numerous comments from the pro- and con-parklet people, with those in favor pointing out that many customers are still reluctant to eat inside, outdoor dining is good for business, and Covid cases could

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Moreno calls for tighter mask rules, then backtracks

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY COUNTY'S health officer Wednesday backpedaled on comments he made the day before suggesting stricter Covid-19 mask rules might have to be followed here, compared to those in effect statewide.

Dr. Ed Moreno made the statement Tuesday afternoon while he was telling the Monterey County Board of Supervisors that the county would not be moving from the Orange Tier to the least restrictive Yellow Tier this week because its coronavirus case score of 2.6 per 100,000 people exceeded the 1.9 threshold for Yellow.

Mask confusion

While explaining what residents could do to help Monterey County achieve Yellow Tier status, Moreno said more people need to get vaccinated, continue to wash their hands, and keep their distance from others to help prevent

coronavirus infection.

But Moreno said citizens need to "continue to use face coverings — even in situations where the state says you can remove your face covering," suggesting that county residents need to adhere to stricter mask rules than mandated by the state.

The Pine Cone asked Moreno Wednesday which situations Moreno was referring to, and if he believed that the California Department of Public Health's guidelines on face masks were not adequate to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. He did not answer the questions.

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Point Lobos advocate wants visitor cap enforced

By CHRIS COUNTS

AN EXISTING visitor limit at Point Lobos State Reserve of just 450 people per day has never been enforced but should be, according to former Point Lobos Foundation President Augie Louis.

The topic is particularly relevant now, Louis said, because California State Parks is revising its local general plan and intends to remove a cap on visitors that was enacted in 1979 but has been disregarded at the famously crowded park.

"There are no visitor limits in the new general plan," Louis told The Pine Cone. "The current general plan includes a visitor capacity of 450 people at any given time. State Parks has ignored the 1979 plan for 42 years."

Local state parks official Brent Marshall pushed back against Louis' assertion that there will be no limits for visitors.

The California State Parks Commission will weigh in on the plan Monday, and anyone who wants to comment can participate through Zoom.

According to Marshall, the reason there is no cap num-

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Fired PGPD police officer fights to get job back

■ Says online comments were 'free speech'

By KELLY NIX

THE PACIFIC Grove police officer fired early this year for political views he expressed online said this week his actions are protected by the First Amendment and vowed to fight to get his job back. He said he's even willing to make his case before U.S. Supreme Court, if necessary.

In his first interview since P.G. Police Chief Cathy Madalone fired him for criticizing the Black Lives Matter organization on a social media site, Michael Gonzalez, 30, said Wednesday night that he has lawyers helping him get reinstated. Gonzalez has appealed his termination to city manager Ben Harvey, who could give him his job back or sustain Madalone's decision.

"I'm not going to let this go," Gonzalez told The Pine Cone in a phone conversation. "If I'm not reinstated with full benefits, insurance and back pay for all this pain and suffering I've gone through and the violation of my constitutional rights, I will take this to the highest court in the United States if I have to."

Opposes group

Gonzalez was placed on administrative leave after he called Black Lives Matter a "hate group," and posted an

image with an expletive before the group's name on a Twitter-like website called Parler.

Gonzalez, who said he was raised for part of his life by a Black stepfather, maintains the posts did not disparage Black people but were intended to criticize the Black Lives Matter group — founded by self-avowed Marxists — for calls by some of its members to "defund the police" and "murder police officers."

He also contends that the Pacific Grove police officers union's policy manual allows employees to "oppose, support or contradict any social issue, cause or religion," which is what he said he did in the Parler posts.

"I didn't represent myself as a police officer," Gonzalez said. "I was totally off duty when I made those posts, and I was speaking to a matter of public concern, which is within my First Amendment rights. I didn't violate any law and I didn't violate any policy."

Gonzalez, who grew up in hardscrabble East Bakersfield, said he never faced accusations of racial bias during the seven years he worked as a law enforcement officer, and that the suggestion he's a bigot

is absurd.

"I'm a dark Hispanic male — second generation Mexican-American," he said. "My family came here as immigrants. It's just crazy to be labeled something like a racist

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Michael Gonzalez