

Midcoast Community Council

*An elected Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
representing Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar*
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September 22, 2014

San Mateo County Planning Commission
via email : planning-commission@smcgov.org

Subject: **La Costanera Restaurant, 8150 Cabrillo Highway, Montara (PLN2006-00494)**

Planning Commissioners:

The Midcoast Community Council (MCC) recommends **against** certification of the Initial Study and Negative Declaration and **against** approval of the Use Permit Amendment to extend restaurant hours to daytime on Fridays and weekends.

Parking calculations are inaccurate. As viewed on historical aerial photos, the informal State Parks lot has for many decades provided 20 or more beach parking spaces, yet calculations credit only 10 existing spaces to this lot. This understates lost weekend parking spaces by 10 and overstates spaces gained on weekdays by the same amount. Gaining weekday parking does not mitigate for loss of weekend parking. Improving the dirt lot is nice, but does not create new parking, nor mitigate for loss of beach parking.

South Lot C cannot accommodate 11 new parking spaces. The proposed restriping and valet parking plan (incorrectly labeled as "existing parking configuration" in Attachment E) lacks accurate measurements. The only parking space measurements shown on the plan are correct for existing spaces, but not for the proposed restriping as depicted, which would give the following:

- 3 additional ocean-front spaces: 11 spaces at 6.5 feet wide
- 1 additional highway-fronting space: 5 spaces at 7.3 feet wide
- 1 additional restaurant-fronting space: 5 spaces at 7.6 feet wide (plus ADA space)

Even compact spaces are generally required to be at least 8 feet wide. Parked vehicles block access to sidewalks in front and back of the restaurant (particularly ADA access). The two proposed valet parking spaces closest to the lot entrance appear physically impossible to maneuver and they block the lot entrance. Valet parking in lot access areas would block existing required pedestrian and bicycle beach access through the lot.

Parking plans are unrealistic and unenforceable. Loss of beach parking will most likely be greater than 19 spaces because the exclusive restaurant valet parking plan is unrealistic in its layout, planned implementation and enforcement. Restaurant operators have continuously demonstrated their disregard for regulations across the board and by going so far as to post restaurant-only tow-away signage at all three lots repeatedly, including the State Parks lot. No matter how much sign clutter is

added to the lots, license plate numbers collected, or citizen enforcers recruited, beach parking in Lots A&B will be impacted during daytime restaurant hours. Where will these 19 displaced beach goers park? Along the highway? On Montara residential streets? Or will they just give up on visiting the beach?

Traffic analysis is inadequate. Traffic counts on a rainy winter weekend, before the tunnel opened, do not adequately evaluate traffic and parking impacts. At the entrance to the restaurant south Lot C there is no shoulder space for southbound right turn, nor center northbound left turn lane into the lot, so any queuing will block Highway 1 traffic flow. Potential future recreational parking, as suggested conceptually in the Highway 1 Safety & Mobility Studies, is a premature assumption. There are no specific projects planned in the vicinity.

Existing restaurant parking is inadequate. The County permitted the “dinner house” in 1977 by allowing evening parking use in the First Street right-of-way, plus granting a 10-car reduction in the off-street parking requirement. If the County did actually abandon First Street, we would like to know what conditions the Board Resolution contained. Where were the 10 cars of the parking exception expected to park along a stretch of highway without shoulders, and no nearby parking except across the highway in a residential neighborhood? The Coastal Commission denied a 1981 application for daytime Sunday operating hours because the amount of available parking had not changed. Nor has it changed in this proposal.

MCC **recommends** requiring the applicant to comply with the existing Use Permit, the Local Coastal Program, and current Planning and Building Regulations. The community has waited a long time since 2006 to see some code compliance, as unpermitted site construction and modifications have continued unabated, daytime beach parking has been impacted by illegal daytime restaurant use and tow-away signage, and the whole area has been lit up like a football field in the evenings. The only real success in all these years has been as a result of direct citizen efforts, particularly the Change.org petition requesting removal of the roof-mounted beach and parking lot floodlights.

The Scenic Corridor’s coastal viewshed, from mountain ridge to ocean, from Devil’s Slide to Montara Gateway, has been preserved as natural open-space parkland. The restaurant site is highly visible from highway and beach and is the only commercial use in the entire viewshed. Rather than minimizing visual impacts, the applicant makes every effort to call attention to the commercial use with added bright colors, multiple flags and advertising banner, proliferation of unpermitted advertising signage and glaring lighting.

MCC is concerned at the prospect of continued delay in addressing unpermitted work until the end of this long multi-jurisdictional permitting process, whenever that may be. Some specific issues are:

- Sections of neglected or illegally maintained riprap appear unstable and hazardous to beach goers.
- Unpermitted 4-foot-high retaining wall construction and fill to create the upper patio (which used to be a steep slope) is not mentioned anywhere. How was this missed?
- Bright white exterior accent paint recently added to gutters, ventilation and lighting fixtures, and deck panels, on the purposefully subdued building exterior should be

returned to brown color. There is confusion in the staff report requiring painting the monument signs brown instead (Condition 15).

- Exterior Lighting (Condition 12) “placed, designed, shielded and downward directed so as to confine direct rays to the parcel where the lighting is located”. This wording should override any conflicting wording in other conditions (#34-36). The privately owned street light fixtures on the two utility poles north and south of the restaurant should be replaced with shielded downward-directed type.
- Landscape Plan (Condition 13): On west side of parking lots, only low-growing landscaping should be planted so as not to obstruct ocean viewing from parked cars. Utility box screening planting should be replenished in the south parking lot. Invasive *Pittosporum* should be removed from existing landscaping and from where it is colonizing the riprap and coastal bluff.
- Bicycle rack and walk/bike paths through Lots A&C (Condition 16 & 33): Keep these conditions regardless of restaurant hours.
- Trash/storage area cover, berm, and drainage to sewer (Condition 18) and Environmental Health Conditions 56-58: These need to be addressed ASAP. The area currently drains to the beach and trash is piled so high it can be seen over the screening wall from the highway.
- Closing time: MCC supports staff recommended clarification of 10:00 PM.

In conclusion, the MCC respectfully requests that the Planning Commission **not** certify the Negative Declaration and **deny** the Use Permit Amendment to allow daytime hours on Fridays and weekends. No new parking will be created to mitigate for loss of beach parking and the proposed parking conditions are unenforceable and do not comply with the public access and recreation policies of the Local Coastal Program and Coastal Act.

Sincerely,

MIDCOAST COMMUNITY COUNCIL
s/Lisa Ketcham, Chair

cc. Camille Leung, Project Planner
Paul Keel, Sector Superintendent, CA State Parks
Supervisor Don Horsley
CCC Staff Nancy Cave, Renée Ananda, Jo Ginsberg

Attachments:

- Photo PDF
- Web quotes re lack of compliance on hours, seating capacity; shortage of parking