

A Brief History of Parking Studies in La Jolla by Martin Mosier

Proposals to address parking problems in the Village aren't new. Parking in the Village has been studied and debated for 25 years. The following is a summary of the many thoughtful and inclusive efforts conducted to date:

La Jolla Parking and Business Improvement Association Study, 1979-1985

From 1979 to December 1985, the La Jolla Parking and Business Improvement Association, Inc. studied parking and traffic problems in La Jolla. Its members were composed of, over time, about 20 La Jolla business people and La Jolla residents, many of whom are still active in the community today. Amongst its 7 recommendations (see La Jolla Parking and Business Improvement Association) were:

1. Construct public parking facility in Central Business District (Village).
2. Formation of La Jolla Parking District Authority to administer the design and construction of such a facility.
3. Install parking meters or a reasonable workable substitute.

None of these recommendations were implemented.

Mayor's Parking Task Force for La Jolla, 1997

In August of 1997, as a result of the previous denial of the Green Dragon Expansion Project by the San Diego City Council, then-Mayor Susan Golding suggested that the community form a task force to review parking and traffic issues throughout La Jolla and make recommendations to the Community and the City for potential improvements.

The Mayor's Task Force was thus formed, consisting of four members each from the La Jolla Town Council, La Jolla Community Planning Association, and Promote La Jolla (BID). It held open weekly meetings at the La Jolla Public Library for 12 weeks (August 5, 1997 to October 21, 1997), had significant input and cooperation from several departments of the City, and then presented its nine recommendations to each of the respective La Jolla Community parent groups for approval.

In November of 1997 each group (the La Jolla Town Council, La Jolla Community Planning Association, and Promote La Jolla (BID)) held public meetings on all nine recommendations and then conducted both group and room votes on each of the nine recommendations. All three groups, by both the vote of their respective boards and by room votes, approved each of the nine recommendations. (see attached La Jolla Community Groups' Votes)

The leading recommendation was to form a Parking District -- establish a La Jolla Parking District within the geographic boundaries of the existing Business Improvement District in order to develop new off street parking facilities.

The La Jolla Shores Association also participated in the design and public hearings for recommendation number 2 - the redesign of the intersection of Ardath/Torrey Pines Road and La Jolla Shores Drive. On December 3, 1997 they had a public information community forum in Sumner Hall on this one issue. The room vote was 27 to 11 in favor of the intersection improvements. The Shores Association was very helpful in providing design alternatives and conducting informational meetings.

After this, the San Diego City Council voted to implement only those (least controversial) Mayor's Task Force recommendations dealing with the Ardath/Torrey Pines intersection (now complete) and signage. Unfortunately, the Task Force itself never envisioned, nor intended, that the recommendations should be taken individually -- The Task Force believed that they were recommending a comprehensive solution to La Jolla's parking and traffic problems. No one recommendation would work as intended by itself -- only if all recommendations were implemented would the community of La Jolla begin to solve its parking and traffic problems.

La Jolla Parking Advisory Committee, 1998-1999

Several weeks later (late 1998) and dissatisfied with the narrow limits of the City Council's actions, a number of La Jollans (approximately 12 – including Scott Peters and other members of each of the same three La Jolla community groups) decided to start meeting once a week, on their own, at Scripps Bank to further study possible solutions to these same parking issues. Thus the PAC (Parking Advisory Committee) was born. PAC met for approximately 8 months. It discussed the apparent need for public parking facilities, seven potential sites, methods of funding, who might own and operate these parking facilities, and related issues. Its conclusions (see Parking Advisory Committee Recommendations) in June of 1999 were:

1. One or more quasi-public parking facilities were needed within the geographic boundary of the Business Improvement District.
2. Seven underdeveloped sites were identified and 3 were prioritized as potential locations for these parking facilities
3. Several methods of financing should be looked at including property assessment and business assessment.

La Jolla Coastal Access & Parking Board Recommendations, 2000

In the spring of 2000, The La Jolla Coastal Access and Parking Board (LJCA&PB) began to look at these same parking issues. LJCA&PB is a joint community board, consisting of three members appointed from each of the three major La Jolla Community Groups, is chartered by the California Coastal Commission and approved by the City of San Diego, and has operated since July of 1995. LJCA&PB, with support and presentations from City staff concluded, once again:

1. That there was an apparent shortage of parking (which will get worse) in La Jolla which frustrates residents, tourists, customers, employees, and beach goers.
2. That this shortage of parking was financially hurting existing businesses, contributing to the unreasonable number of business turnovers in La Jolla.
3. This problem could be alleviated by construction of several parking facilities (200 to 300 parking spaces each, for a total of approximately 800 spaces).
4. Narrowed down the number of practical parking facility sites to 3.
5. That the City of San Diego could not and would not provide funding for building or operating a community parking facility in La Jolla.
6. Realized that any quasi-public garage would operate with an ongoing operating deficit until its construction loan was paid off.
7. That on-street parking time limits were being abused by employees, amongst others, contributing to a shortage of on-street parking.
8. That pay and display meters would have several benefits including forcing employee cars off the street and into parking facilities.
9. That parking time limits should generally be expanded and changed to a uniform 90 minutes within the BID, with increased number of 15 minute spaces.
10. That parking time limits should generally be expanded and changed to a uniform 3 hours along the coast adjacent to the BID.
11. Suggested that on-street parking could be improved and increased in the existing public right of ways within the BID boundary by increasing the use of diagonal, rather than parallel parking, and other improvements to streetscape, lighting and landscaping.
12. Determined that pay and display meters on the streets within the BID were the only practical method of financing all of this; including a parking facility, its ongoing operation, employee parking programs, transportation programs, and other desired street, lighting and landscape improvements.

Visitor-Serving Parking Study of La Jolla, 2002

In late 2000, the City of San Diego initiated a study of these same issues by Wilbur Smith Associates. In the spring of 2002 and approximately \$140,000 later (paid by the City), Wilbur Smith came to essentially the same conclusions as above (see Summary of Visitor Parking Study for La Jolla).

In September of 2002, Promote La Jolla, the business improvement district of La Jolla sponsored four community informational forums at its own expense. Three thousand mailers were sent to members of Promote La Jolla, La Jolla Town Council and the La Jolla Community Planning Association. The purpose was to inform community members of the Wilbur Smith study recommendations and to get input. Promote La Jolla took the lead role because it is the only state and city authorized group that could administer a parking district in the Village of La Jolla. Promote La Jolla (BID) was formed under the 1989 State of California Parking and Business Improvement Act. This enables Promote La Jolla, under state law, to implement parking and traffic projects within the BID with the consent of the City.

The Land Use & Housing Committee of the San Diego City Council, chaired by La Jolla area City Councilman Scott Peters, accepted the Wilbur Smith study in 2002 with the following actions: the committee voted to narrow the list of prospective parking garages sites in the study to three (see Summary of Visitor Parking Study for La Jolla) and specifically eliminated the idea of placing diagonal parking on residential streets, unless specifically requested by local residents. Councilman Peters then formed another La Jolla Parking Task Force to discuss the implementation of the Wilbur Smith study.

City Manager's Parking Task Force, 2003-2004

The La Jolla Task Force's work was placed on hold in the fall of 2003, when the San Diego City Council formed a broader task force, under the City Manager, to re-examine the way parking is managed throughout the City of San Diego. The City Manager's Parking Task Force, comprised mostly of citizens, recommended radically restructuring the way parking is managed in the city. It called for communities, through local BID's or other appropriate agencies, to be empowered to create customized parking solutions for their own neighborhoods, rather than using a one-size-fits-all city-wide approach. On March 24, 2004, the LU&H Committee directed City staff to review and comment on the recommendations and report back in May.

Solutions for the Future

What's next? Clearly, the parking issues in La Jolla have been studied to death. Obstructionists will still call for more input, more forums where people can say they don't want anything to change, and – all the while – parking problems will continue to worsen. Why? Because no matter what we do, the region around us will continue to grow, and people will still want to come here for the same reason we chose to live here – because La Jolla is one of the most beautiful natural environments in the world.

The solution for La Jolla isn't the installation of gun-metal grey parking meters; it's a comprehensive, state-of-the-art program that serves residents, merchants and visitors. It's time to work together to design a program that works for everyone in La Jolla.

Martin Mosier is past president of the La Jolla Town Council, a long-time resident, business owner and property owner in La Jolla, and a volunteer member of many of the parking advisory committees mentioned above.