

Proposed Parking Plan in Alamitos Bay Marina

By Ava Garderet

Alamitos Bay Marina (ABM) has been a popular destination for both locals and tourists since its opening in the 1950s – a lovely area featuring local restaurants, businesses and of course, the iconic Seal Beach Yacht Club. As the prime waterfront location has continued to attract more successful renovations and business, it has put the marina on Long Beach City's radar as an opportunity to tap into revenue by taking advantage of the high demand of its parking.

In August of 2019, the City hired Walker Parking Consultants (Walker) to conduct a parking study to help the City develop a plan. In their words, "the overarching goal is to efficiently manage parking demand and ensure equitable coastal access for all visitors." While the plan recommended by Walker includes many proposals, the focus is on a paid parking program that would likely have extreme effects on key stakeholders (restaurants, retail, the Yacht Club) in the marina. Although in the proposal Walker states they "solicited feedback to understand their needs and expectations," it only took a couple of interviews with restaurant managers to discover that they actually had very minimal knowledge of the plan at all.

For example, the manager of the Crab Pot had heard of the parking plan but had no knowledge of how it was going to be implemented or would affect his business, while the managers of San Pedro Fish Market and Schooner or Later reported that they hadn't been informed or contacted about it at all. Mr. Patrick Holleran, owner of Mallainey's voiced his opinion that it "is a horrible situation" and was frustrated that "in the midst of a pandemic when all of our businesses have already been so negatively impacted, now they want to make our customers pay when they have been able to park there for free for the past 50 years. And the worst part," he said, "is that our lease clearly states that we are entitled to free use of the parking space." When I asked about the city's efforts to involve them in the planning process, he remarked that although they were aware of and technically invited to attend the public meetings, it was clear that the stakeholders' input was not being considered or prioritized.

Last Thursday, January 13th, the Marine Advisory Commission (MAC) held a public meeting, where Joan Palango, representing the Yacht Club and the Long Beach Boat Owners Association (BOA), gave a presentation in opposition of the proposed parking plan. Her impressively thorough analysis of the proposal revealed several valid concerns of the BOA.

As far as legal concerns, Walker's research and proposal made no reference to the extremely relevant rulings of either the California or the Long Beach Coastal Commission, both of which must be contacted for approval before proceeding with any changes to the marina. The city's Coastal Commission has made it extremely clear that the marina has been at full capacity for many years now, in terms of both human use and ecological viability. There are 2,654 parking spaces and obligations for 3,619, meaning that whether or not they are all physically in use at the same time, the city has legally binding commitments to 136% of the marina's spaces. That is an issue in itself, but it also reveals that every spot is accounted for in leases with marina stakeholders, leases which designate those spots as unpaid, first come first serve. "They are

starting in the wrong place,” Ms. Palango said, “they really need to learn about and resolve these complicated and overextended contracts and agreements before trying to implement a new program.”

Changing the marina’s free parking to metered paid parking would undoubtedly have detrimental effects on the beloved Seal Beach Yacht Club. Ms. Palango stated at the meeting on Thursday that “of the club’s approximately 350 members, 60% are not boat owners, meaning they do not have a parking pass and would have to pay...essentially deterring the majority of our members from coming to the dinners, parties, races and other events that we host at the club. And as far as our boating members that do have passes, the new proposal would require them to park in a different basin after only 3 days, which is just totally inconvenient. Walker doesn’t understand that our owners treat their boats and the marina like a second home – they pay property taxes on the boats, an economic contribution that the city should consider, and most of them are locals who vote and pay taxes in the district.” By implementing paid parking, the city would essentially be further taxing the boat owners on a service they have depended on for the last half century.

Ms. Palango also raised the question “who will benefit from the paid parking?” Where does the revenue generated by the marking meters go – will it be used to make up any shortcomings in stakeholder income that resulted from this plan? Doubtful. Ms. Palango voiced the likelihood that the money will go to Tidelands, with no connection to the marina. “I suppose the subcontractor will benefit, but it seems like a high risk, low reward project for the city.” As she pointed out, the city doesn’t charge you when you play golf at a city golf course, so charging in this public domain is inconsistent. She thinks this project was inspired by the expensive parking system at the 2nd and PCH development, which has caused their employees to migrate to the marina, where they can park for free. “I can see where the dollar signs are going off in their heads,” Ms. Palango said. “They see an opportunity to collect and I don’t fault them for trying, but they need to do their research and due diligence to understand the situation we are in. In nautical terms, ‘they pulled up the anchor without a clear passage to the destination.’”

It has become apparent that the impression that Walker gave at the beginning of this project of this being a collaborative effort is not the reality. Ms. Palango reflected that “very few retailers have shown up at these public meetings to make comments or suggestions,” even though their involvement is crucial and their livelihoods are at stake. Ms. Palango also expressed that everything the BOA used to investigate their concerns is public information – the reality is that “we did our homework and Walker did not.” Finally, she wanted to emphasize that “the BOA is not anti growth, and we are absolutely willing to take a collaborative approach. We just ask for respect for everything we have contributed and for the city to honor its commitments and stay consistent with us as stakeholders, as well as with the coastal commission. We think our findings are relevant and important, and would like them to be included in the conversation.”