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Sausalito ponders makeover of downtown parking hub



A car pulls out of a spot at a public parking lot at the Sausalito ferry landing on Sept. 28, 2023. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)

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PUBLISHED: February 2, 2026 at 12:02 PM PST | UPDATED: February 2, 2026 at 3:34 PM PST

Brad Cornelius studied the large poster showing the ferry landing, parks, pedestrian promenade and streets surrounding parking lot 1, an unremarkable 144-space site in downtown Sausalito.

“My wife and I are opening a shop this year on Bridgeway and this is where our customers will be parking,” said Cornelius, harbormaster of Galilee Harbor. “This is fascinating insight into seeing how we’re going to balance the different needs between pedestrians, ferry riders, cars, bicyclists and end up with something that is a net improvement over what’s there today.”

That task packed the City Council chambers on Thursday for a workshop on three proposals to upgrade the parking lot. Dozens of residents were asked to weigh in on

granular details, such as parking space sizes and tree canopies, to the more visionary aspects of renovating a public resource so that it is functional, welcoming and possibly iconic.

“We acknowledge there has been a lot of ideas and visions out there,” said consultant Robert Stevens. “We also want to tell you there’s a limit to the dream.”

BP pauses buyback to trim debt as quarterly profit meets forecasts

Last July, the council approved spending \$2.5 million to update the lot, with directions to retain 144 parking spaces. The council hopes the design will be finalized this spring, bids will be sought next fall and the makeover will be completed by spring 2027.

A half-dozen posters describing the site’s history, issues and redesign options lined the council chambers. The illustrations set the context, cited constraints, listed pros and cons of various options and asked attendees to “help us prioritize improvements.”

The variables include parking space layouts, sidewalks, traffic access, circulation, trees, landscaping, electric-vehicle charging and bike parking. Former proposals dating back a half-century, including turning the parking lot into a pedestrian plaza, were noted.

Consultants presented three options. First would involve repaving and restriping the lot, although some spaces would be smaller. Many of the 38 Indian laurel fig trees, which are unhealthy, would be replaced with large trees.

The second option would bisect the lot with a tree-lined pedestrian walkway from the ferry exit ramp to Anchor Street, which connects to Bridgeway. A vehicle pickup and drop-off zone would be created. More greenery, including bioswales to collect stormwater and support the trees, would be added.

The third option would create an area next to the ferry landing that could be closed to vehicles during peak season or special events. Vina Del Mar Park, which is one of the city’s oldest parks and borders Tracy Promenade, could add a new entrance for ferry passengers.



Drivers pay for parking at kiosks in the public lot near the ferry terminal in Sausalito, Calif., on Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)

Options two and three would cost more than \$2.5 million, the consultants said. The consultants asked attendees to circulate, study the design illustrations, write their comments on Post-Its and place them on the posters. They wanted to know what design elements were liked and disliked.

“What I see today is that Vina Del Mar Park, Tracy Promenade, the new ferry landing and the parking lot all come from different eras,” said Cornelius. “They’re projects that are completely unrelated in when they were conceived and when they were executed. Something that can tie these things together is attractive to me.”

“There is an obsession with pedestrian space,” said Mark Flaherty, manager of the neighboring Inn Above The Tide, speaking of option three. “It is a parking lot. It will never be beautiful.”

“His business and my business bring in clients — affluent clients,” said Tom Gangitano, owner of Gene Hiller Menswear, standing next to Flaherty. “They support everything; restaurants, retailers. This seems to add a couple of spaces, but it makes them smaller.”

The consultants asked everyone to take their seats and briefly share their thoughts.

Most present praised the city's effort to upgrade its tourist hub. There was wide agreement the parking lot has become an eyesore that needs a makeover. The parking options for bicycles are not working and a poor use of space, several people said.

There were concerns more analysis is needed to understand vehicle and pedestrian circulation patterns. Drivers might not use Anchor Street to drop off and pick up riders, as one scenario envisioned. Keeping Vina Del Mar Park's single entrance mattered to several people who said that was safer for children, seniors and pets.

There were also calls for the City Council to embrace a more visionary approach.

"It's more than a parking lot," said Sharna Brockett of Positive People for Sausalito. "This is the heart of our downtown and it hasn't really been reimagined."

"It breaks my heart that the center of our downtown remains a parking lot," said Michael Rex, a Sausalito architect who helped redesign the ferry landing. "The broader vision is really important. I think lot 1, we can still keep parking there, but not as many. And I think it could become more park-like, pedestrian-like."