

LOCAL VIEWPOINT

Avila Beach traffic: Let's get real

*SLO County's method of evaluating traffic in Avila Beach seriously underestimates congestion
As a result, Avila Beach does not receive its fair share of traffic mitigation fees
The update of the community's General Plan provides an opportunity to correct this mistake*

BY CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR AVILA STEERING COMMITTEE

It's an exciting time for Avila Beach lovers: After years of asking for an Avila Area General Plan update, it is finally happening. And the first order of business is eliminating a traffic evaluation method that is putting the safety of our tiny beach town at risk.

Since 1995, traffic evaluations have been based on the average hourly traffic counts taken between 3 and 6 p.m. on weekdays during the second week in May. As most of us know, traffic tends to be lighter on those days, compared with traffic generated during the summer and early fall. As a consequence, over the years, insufficient traffic fees have been collected and we have more and more congestion on Avila Beach Drive.

Many locals and residents of San Luis Obispo County have banded together to form Concerned Citizens for Avila to help preserve the natural environment, safety and accessibility of Avila Beach. The group is asking the county Board of Supervisors to immediately remove the unsafe traffic evaluation method from the General Plan. Then, during the update process and with community input, consider a more appropriate standard.

All proposed development projects in Avila now use this unrealistic traffic evaluation method — even hotels and resorts, which get the heaviest traffic on Fridays through Sundays during summer (and increasingly during “shoulder” months). Avila is the only area in the county with specific wording in the General Plan about traffic evaluation. For all other unincorporated areas, the public works department simply does its job of addressing traffic impacts. Only in Avila does new development proceed without triggering adequate traffic fees to mitigate congestion and parking impacts.

Further, limiting traffic evaluation for visitor-serving projects to a second weekday in May is inconsistent with the California law requiring identification and mitigation of impacts, which includes traffic (California Environmental Quality Act).

ONLY IN AVILA DOES NEW DEVELOPMENT PROCEED WITHOUT TRIGGERING ADEQUATE TRAFFIC FEES TO MITIGATE CONGESTION AND PARKING IMPACTS.

Avila's one way in, one way out and narrow winding road — coupled with high fire hazard, earthquake faults, a nuclear power facility and tsunami potential — create a unique safety challenge. The safety of thousands of people who converge in tiny Avila on Fridays through Sundays during the majority of the year makes normalizing Avila traffic evaluation critical.

On July 19, the Board of Supervisors will have the opportunity to decide on whether to eliminate the 1995 General Plan requirement for traffic evaluation. Let's get real about Avila traffic and protect our cherished beach town and all those who come to experience its beauty.

Ann Feeser, Sherri Danoff, Beverly Henry, Martin Suits, Marti Brand, Carol Goldberg, Betty Hartig and Heather Nelson serve on the steering committee of Concerned Citizens for Avila.