

The Malibu Times

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COUNCIL SAYS 'NO' TO CAMPING

The proposal heads to the California Coastal Commission

By Jonathan Friedman/Assistant Editor

To the anger of Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Executive Director Joe Edmiston, the City Council this morning unanimously voted against the portion of his parks access plan to bring overnight camping sites to the city of Malibu, except for the two proposed for disabled visitors at Ramirez Canyon Park. The council supported most of the other features of the plan.

"The best thing for Malibu is not to allow overnight camping," said Mayor Pro Tem Pamela Conley Ulich, who was the lone council member not to support overnight camping when the council first heard this issue last month. She added, "I want to commend [the rest of the council] for rethinking this."

Councilmember Ken Kearsley said although he was changing his vote from the last meeting, he still did not agree with the residents who have claimed overnight camping creates a fire danger.

"There is not one scintilla of evidence that as far as I can see that camping is going to start any more fires," Kearsley said. "There are illegal campsites that cause fires. But legal campsites, supervised, it doesn't happen."

Councilmember Sharon Barovsky, who made the motion today for the council vote, said she decided to oppose overnight camping after speaking with "rational people" in the community.

"I don't think with anything since I've been on council have I communicated with so many people, many of them rational and sound, and of course many of them not so rational," Barovsky said.

Barovsky noted that the California Coastal Commission has the final say on the matter since the Conservancy's proposal is actually an amendment to the city's Local Coastal Program. The council and the residents opposed to the Conservancy's plan will have to convince the Coastal Commission, which usually supports public access proposals, that overnight camping is not a good idea.

"Let us fight the fight," Barovsky told the audience. "You have a lot of work to do."

Edmiston blasted the council's decision. "What you're really saying is, 'No we don't want people from the outside to come [into Malibu] and camp if you can't afford 50 bucks,'" he said, referring to the cost of overnight camping in some of the parks in the unincorporated portion of the Malibu area. Conley Ulich responded by giving some of the prices for Malibu area parks that are cheaper than that.

The meeting was a rowdy affair full of many boos and cheers from the nearly 100-person audience, with Mayor Jeff Jennings having to slam his gavel several times to quiet the scene as television cameras from news stations throughout Southern California looked on.

With the issue moving to the California Coastal Commission, Edmiston says he expects an outcome more to his liking.

"Fortunately, this isn't the end of the battle," the Conservancy head said in a press release. "We will bring our case to the California Coastal Commission where, unlike at the Malibu City Council, the broad public interest can get a fair hearing."

Several council members said they believe the final decision will actually be made in the courtroom, something they said likely will not have a good outcome.

Barovsky said after the meeting, "I never think it's good to have a judge decide land-use issues."