

Coastal commission OKs \$92M Surf Busway

By CHRIS COUNTS

REVERSING ITS opposition to a plan to build a bus route along a section of the historic railroad corridor between Marina and Sand City, the California Coastal Commission voted 7-1 last week to approve the \$92 million Surf Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project. The Portola Hotel in Monterey was the site of the commission’s monthly meeting.

“We did it,” declared Carl Sedoryk, general manager of Monterey-Salinas Transit, which proposed the plan to build the 4.3-mile long, two-lane bus road. “Today’s win was years in the making. We are eager to get shovels in the ground and start building more connected communities and opportunities.”

Plans originally called for placing the bus route next to the train tracks, which haven’t been used since 1971. But the coastal commission opposed the move, warning it would damage critical dune habitat. An alternative was proposed in which the tracks would be removed and replaced with the bus line.

Bus vs. rail?

The alternative route was opposed by some who warned the move could jeopardize a future revival of the rail route. The Transportation Agency for Monterey County, which owns the land, previously opposed the idea for that reason. But backers of the busway insist it won’t stop a rail project, which officials say is likely decades away from being built — if ever.

According to 4th District Monterey County Supervisor Wendy Root Askew, the project, located in her district, marks “a generational investment” in public transit.

“It will increase equitable access to our coast and is

See **BUSWAY** page 23A

Water board admits defeat, ends fight with anti-tax org

By KELLY NIX

DIRECTORS WITH the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District Monday voted unanimously to accept an appellate court decision regarding a longstanding water supply charge.

On Sept. 11, the Sixth District Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the Monterey Peninsula Taxpayers Association, which sued the district over the charge which the Superior

Forum sets up battle for control at city hall

■ Potter vs. Baron vs. Byrne for mayor

By MARY SCHLEY

A SEASONED politician, a councilman with six years at the dais, and a community organizer who founded a nonprofit during Covid to spearhead beautification projects around town made their cases at a forum Tuesday for why voters should choose them to be Carmel’s next mayor.

Following a panel featuring the five candidates for city council, incumbent Mayor Dave Potter and challengers Jeff Baron and Dale Byrne got their turn on stage at the Carmel Residents Association event, which was moderated by Pine Cone publisher Paul Miller.

‘New leader’ needed

In his opening statement, Baron described his busy schedule on behalf of the city and said he works so hard in his service on the council and other boards because “Carmel is incredibly important to me.”

“If we don’t work to protect it, it will erode over time,” he said. “It requires a city government that listens to residents, especially those who can’t attend meetings.” Since first winning his council seat in 2018, Baron has distributed a newsletter to constituents and held regular “office hours” at a downtown café. A hallmark of his campaign is knocking on doors.

Byrne, the founder of Carmel Cares, said the city “needs a breath of fresh air and a new leader.”

“We hear government should be for the people, but we see it being done to the people,” he said. “I am offering leadership that has already made visible improvements.”

Potter explained some of his health issues, including a back surgery that requires him to get up and move every 30 minutes, before arguing for maintaining the status quo as much as possible on a council that will inevitably see

See **MAYOR** page 24A

■ Five candidates for two council seats

By MARY SCHLEY

THE MEN vying for two Carmel City Council seats in the upcoming Nov. 5 election had their first opportunity Tuesday night to compare their views on the top issues of the day and show why voters should pick them over their opponents.

At a forum hosted by the Carmel Residents Association and moderated by Pine Cone publisher Paul Miller Sept.



PHOTO/MANNY ESPINOZA

A Carmel Residents Association forum with (at table, left to right) mayoral candidates Jeff Baron, Dale Byrne and Dave Potter drew a big crowd Tuesday.

17, candidates were asked to weigh in on everything from the budget and house numbers to the police station, state housing demands and getting residents more involved in local government.

On some issues, they were unified. Hans Buder, Bob Delves, Danny Hala, Parker Logan and David O’Neil all professed interest in converting Carmel from a general law city to a charter city to protect it from some state mandates, said they oppose any sort of paid parking, and want to find more and better ways for residents to speak their minds and feel heard by decision makers.

The hot topic

In the age-old debate over house numbers — which the council narrowly decided last week should be put to voters in a November 2025 ballot measure that may or may not be binding — some were open to the idea, and one was not.

See **COUNCIL** page 29A

POST OFFICE REPAIRS FINALLY IN PIPELINE

By MARY SCHLEY

NEARLY FIVE months after a Pebble Beach woman crashed her car into the front of the Carmel post office, a contractor has received a permit to begin repairs.

“This afternoon, we issued conditional approval of a building permit for the post office. We finally received an application from the property manager’s contractor a few days ago and then expedited review,” assistant city administrator Brandon Swanson told The Pine Cone Wednesday.

On Thursday, the contractor submitted the required documents and fees, and the city granted the permit, according to Swanson, who said work can begin immediately.

Sign of progress

The permit issued Sept. 19 to Cal Construction to “repair vehicle damage to the front of the building, windows, store front and wood posts,” and “repair brick flower bed and wood trim around windows” is the first sign of progress since the dramatic April 24 crash.

At around lunchtime that day, Rebecca Rouso, 74, was parked in a handicap space in the lot opposite the post office and inadvertently hit the accelerator in her Tesla Model S, which careened across the street into the front of the building, narrowly missing a pedestrian.

Playground’s chalk transformation



PHOTO/PAUL BLACK

Resembling a crop circle, a 56-foot-wide chalk labyrinth was made Sept. 13 by 300 students at Forest Grove Elementary School in Pacific Grove. Organized by parent Kim Kasner Stone, the chalk art project has been a tradition at the school since 2014.

‘Belt-tightening’

“It will not mean the demise of the district, by any means,” Stoldt, who was not at Monday’s meeting, said Tuesday. “It will just be a belt-tightening for a few years.”

Directors made the decision to give up the legal fight after taxpayers association president Rick Heuer early at Monday’s meeting asked them to do so.

“I’m here to urge you to stop spending taxpayer money fighting a lawsuit that you’ve already lost three times,” said Heuer.

He went on to say that the water district should focus on how it will “refund the taxpayers the money” it collected from the fee.

After the taxpayers association filed its lawsuit against the district, Monterey County Superior Court Judge Carrie Panetta ruled in March 2023 that the agency’s continued collection of the funds violated a sunset provision in the

See **DEFEAT** page 23A

See **REPAIRS** page 28A