

Yacht runs aground in Stillwater Cove



PHOTO/PAULA HAZDOVAC

It’s not every day you find a 50-foot yacht on the beach at Stillwater Cove. The boat ran aground early Wednesday morning, and it’s been a major undertaking to remove it.

‘Higher standards’ for battery storage safety

By CAITLIN CONRAD

STATE SEN. John Laird has introduced legislation in response to January’s massive battery fire in Moss Landing. The Clean Energy and Safety Act, SB 283, would mandate new facilities be built to a higher standard of safety and that construction involve oversight by local firefighters.

“SB 283 ensures that future battery energy storage facilities adhere to the highest fire safety standards, protecting first responders, local communities and the integrity of our renewable energy transition,” said Laird.

Fire officials

Under the new bill, battery storage developers would be required to engage local fire authorities prior to getting building approvals. Those authorities would address the facility’s design and assess potential risks before energy companies’ projects could get a green light, either in a local approval process or from the California Energy Commission.

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P.B. makeover spurs debate over ocean views

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE OWNER of a high-profile mansion on 17 Mile Drive wants to make improvements to the property, including building a 1,171-square-foot non-habitable structure described as “a pavilion.”

But Monterey County planning staff contends that a permit for the pavilion should be denied because it would block a view of the ocean from the famous road that runs past it. That set up a clash when the planning commission met considered the permit on Wednesday.

The owner of the impressive, Spanish-style, 8,700-square-foot home, Riley Bechtel, whose family has had it since the 1960s, plans to do exterior modifications, including the construction of a 182-square-foot

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By MARY SCHLEY

THE CAREFUL process of removing a yacht that ran aground near the Pebble Beach Golf Links early Wednesday morning continued Thursday, with efforts underway to ensure fuel and other contaminants didn’t end up in the bay, according to officials at the scene. Meanwhile, the cause of the accident — whether some type of mechanical failure or negligence by the people on board — remains under investigation.

Sometime around 4 a.m. March 26, Cal Fire received a call that a vessel was in distress in Stillwater Cove, and firefighters arrived to discover a 50-foot motor yacht had run aground, becoming stranded on the beach. The occupants had contacted the U.S. Coast Guard, according to Battalion Chief Curtis Rhodes, which in turn alerted the fire agency, since it’s responsible for the shoreline.

Waiting for high tide

The two people aboard managed to reach the beach on their own, Rhodes said, and throughout the morning Wednesday, emergency responders, including divers, worked to free the yacht from the shore so it could be towed back to the Monterey Harbor. But receding tides made the task impossible, and plans were made to remove its batteries, fuel and any other hazardous substances before they could leak into the protected bay waters.

Observing that high tide would not return until around 10 p.m., one of the people in charge of the effort commented over the radio, “I’m not going to work in the dark.” He said he would return to Breakwater Cove and let the boat’s owner, who has not been named, know the status of the recovery effort.

In the parking lot of the Beach & Tennis Club Thursday

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HOUSING PLAN COULD RELY ON HOTEL CONVERSIONS

■ ‘Live/work’ spaces and more

By MARY SCHLEY

WILL THE owners of “underperforming” hotels be willing to convert them into affordable housing and sell or move their room rights? Will downtown landlords allow live/work arrangements in their vacant commercial spaces? Will property owners build granny units and then deed-restrict them as low-cost housing in exchange for water credits or reduced permit fees? Are churches likely to build onsite housing?

Some of those concepts debuted at a special Carmel Planning Commission workshop Tuesday night, and questions about their viability will need to be answered, at least theoretically, if the state is going to accept them as possible responses to the requirement that the city identify potential sites for 149 affordable units as part of its mandated housing element. The plan, which the California Department of Housing and Community Development certified last year, outlines ways to facilitate 349 new residences through 2031 — including placing income-restricted housing on public parking lots at Sunset Center and Vista Lobos.

Land is scarce

But some residents vocally opposed using those sites for apartment buildings, and the city council soon after gave them the go-ahead to come up with other solutions. As a result, a group including city councilman Hans Buder and members of the Carmel Residents Association, calling itself Affordable Housing Alternatives was formed. Last fall, the city signed a \$59,999 contract with consultant Veronica Tam & Associates to assist it.

The AHA group has been meeting weekly, sometimes more frequently, and working with city staff, the consultant, the state and others with the

45 mph speed limit coming to Highway 1

By CHRIS COUNTS

TO COMPLY with what it says are state and federal safety regulations, Caltrans intends to lower speed limits on Highway 1 in Big Sur. The state roads agency says it will also remove a slew of road signs along the scenic route and put up new ones in some places.

The California Coastal Commission unanimously approved the plan at its March 12 meeting in Santa Cruz, despite opposition from some locals, including former Congressman Sam Farr.

While some of the new signs will post revised speed limits, others will alert drivers to curves. The measure lowers the speed limit from 55 mph to 40 or 45 mph along much of the highway between Point Sur and the Monterey County line — a distance of 54 miles.

Caltrans reports the changes must be done to comply with “state and federal highway safety standards.”

Outcry from locals

Initially, Caltrans proposed installing more than 900 signs along the world-famous scenic highway. But due to viewshed concerns, coastal commission official Eric Stevens reported that Caltrans and his agency worked together to come up with an alternate plan to eliminate “all but the most necessary signs, replacing signs where feasible and removing as many existing signs as possible.”

“There would be a net reduction of 27 signs in the affected corridor,” Stevens said. “The visual impacts of signs have been reduced as far as they can be.”

The vote came despite an outcry from some residents,

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goals of preserving “scarce public land,” distributing housing throughout the city rather than in concentrated, high-density developments, and following traditional land use patterns. Doing so, its members argue, will help replace a “shrinking population” to “bring back locals: teachers, nurses, firefighters and service professionals,” representatives said at the March 25 session.

How many will be built?

One prong of the solution is granny units — officially known as accessory dwelling units — CRA board member Nancy Twomey explained. Based on permit trends, the group proposes increasing the estimated number that could be built during the life of the plan from 34 to 60 and then adding another 15 that might result from incentives like water credits and fee discounts if the owners are willing to deed-restrict them as affordable rentals.

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Controlled burn in Hatton Canyon



PHOTO/MICHAEL TROUTMAN, DMT IMAGING

Dead wood and debris burn under close supervision in Hatton Canyon Tuesday, part of an effort to reduce the risk of a dangerous wildfire in the area. See page 3A.