

Bayview's free-parking zone: sidewalk

Will Kane

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Some of Cristina Llop's neighbors in the city's Bayview district are so confident they won't get a ticket for illegally parking on the sidewalk that one even decorated a car for Halloween.

Residents who live on the 1400 block of Palou Avenue say parking scofflaws avoid the angst of on-street parking by simply pulling their cars, trucks and SUVs onto the sidewalk - for days and often weeks at a time.

And, Llop says, they seemingly get a free ride from parking enforcement officers who roll by in three-wheeled scooters and issue nary a ticket to the cars on the sidewalk.

"There's no risk at all to parking on the sidewalk," Llop told Chronicle Watch, pointing to one car that sat on the sidewalk for nine to 10 months and was sometimes decorated for holidays.

City parking officials acknowledged that parking on the sidewalk is against the law, but told Chronicle Watch it is sometimes permitted if the cars are not blocking pedestrian access.

The issue isn't unique to the Bayview, said Carla Johnson of the Mayor's Office on Disability, who has observed cars parked on the sidewalk all over town.

"It can be a very serious issue for someone with disabilities," Johnson said. "They have to leave the safety of the sidewalk and go into the street, which can be dangerous."

Federal laws require that pedestrians have at least 4 feet of cleared space on the sidewalk, said Bob Planthold, a San Francisco resident who is chair of the California Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Planthold, who uses braces and crutches to walk, said sidewalk parking has been an issue in San Francisco and other major cities for decades.

Cars on sidewalks make it difficult for vulnerable pedestrians to get around town, Planthold said.

"It means the blind, it means people in a wheelchair, it means people pushing strollers, it means, theoretically, a group of preschoolers walking to or from the library have to get into the street to walk," he said. "A person who is blind could theoretically be in the outer edges of a traffic lane."

Llop, who works from home, said she's tired of people getting off without tickets while she struggles to find a legal place to park on the street.

Residents in her neighborhood, she said, don't even try to park at the curb, they just park on the sidewalk by default.

Parking officers often drive down her street, but Llop said she's hardly ever seen them issue a ticket, which carries a \$105 fine.

"The only time the meter maids ticket is during street cleaning, and sometimes, often, they drive right by," she said.

Paul Rose, a Municipal Transportation Agency spokesman, said parking officers use their discretion to decide whether a car is blocking pedestrian access.

"The reason we enforce the rule is to ensure that there is sidewalk access," he said. "That is the only reason we would write a citation.

"If there is access, they have the discretion (not to issue a ticket)," he added.

Llop said she has tried calling the parking bosses for help, but hasn't gotten much support. The one time parking officers ticketed cars on the sidewalk en masse last fall, residents became so upset that they were yelling at the parking officers, she said, adding that police officers had to respond to settle emotions.

Planthold, who doesn't drive, said that kind of response wasn't surprising, given San Francisco's love affair with cars.

"It is important to state that driving is not a right, driving is a privilege," he said.

Chronicle Watch

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What's not working

Issue: Drivers in the Bayview - and across the city - park on city sidewalks for days and days without ever getting a ticket, making it difficult for pedestrians using the walkways.

What's been done: Parking enforcement officers can decide when someone is blocking the sidewalk and issue a \$105 ticket. Enforcement is inconsistent.

Who's responsible: Ed Reiskin, head of the Municipal Transportation Agency, (415) 701-4730, ed.reiskin@sfmta.com. Report any problem to enforcement dispatch: (415) 553-1200.

Will Kane writes for Chronicle Watch, a weekly feature that investigates stubborn problems. E-mail: wkane@sfchronicle.com, chroniclewatch@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@ellenhuet](https://twitter.com/ellenhuet), [@SFChronWatch](https://twitter.com/SFChronWatch)

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