

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #69



### MONTEREY CITY COUNCIL'S FORTUNE COOKIE

*Naming The Homeless Dragon Is How To Tame It. . .*

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**CONTRARY** to some public opinion, Monterey City Council should be commended—not condemned--says Buddha, whose metaphorical advice from the slip of paper in my Buddha Bowl was so sage I had to consult an interpreter: *Naming the Dragon is how to tame it.*

“Can you explain what this means?” I asked MJ Becco, US Army veteran-turned-haiku-poet who retired from a 20-year military career in Springfield, Missouri.

MJ responded like a dragon swallowing its own tail. “I learned it from a teacher in Korea. When you can name a fear, you can control it.”

“MJ, you described tactics used by bombastic politicians at this week’s presidential-race kickoffs. Who do you predict will win?”

“The unknown dragon will defeat the spirit,” Buddha Becco said.

### Dragons In Opposition

So, how does Buddha’s ancient adage apply to Monterey’s 3-2 vote at its Jan. 19 meeting at which city council members upheld the Planning Commission’s denial of the use permit to allow six homeless women to sleep in their cars in the parking lot of the First Methodist Church at 1 Soledad Drive under the aegis of the One Starfish Safe Parking Program?

Within hours after council’s vote, based on its conclusion the program was valid but the location was not right, former Monterey County Herald editor Joe Livernois published an online editorial in the Monterey Bay Partisan that pilloried the city by comparing it to “The Great American Tragedy.”

### Confucius Say What?

I asked myself, “Buddha, is Joe Livernois right?” The answer came as a thought, “*Ask Confucius.*” And so Wikipedia referred me to “The Confucian Analects” and this advice:

*He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place, and all the stars turn towards it.*

Metaphorically, what did this mean? I thought of my dad's God-fearing Ozarks' Southern Baptist advice: *Get your facts straight from the horse's mouth, not from the horse thief.* Dad also liked to quote one of his favorite TV heroes, Jack Webb of the old Dragnet series: *Just the facts, ma'am.*

So, just who are the influential dragon-people with opposing opinions? According to the Chinese Zodiac, their positive traits make them: magnanimous, stately, vigorous, strong, self-assured, proud, noble, direct, dignified, and passionate.

Their negative traits paint them as tactless, arrogant, imperious, tyrannical, demanding, rebellious, intolerant, dogmatic, violent, and impetuous.

That makes dragon people humanity-at-large.

I withdrew a final philosophical guide from my Buddha Bowl to point me toward clearing up the question: Is or is not Monterey as villainous as some people believe?

Buddha said: *Cessation is when the idea that enchanted is gone.*

It clearly was time to stop speculating and recap facts about what really happened since Monterey's landmark 3-2 vote two weeks ago. Did Monterey snub the homeless, as many believe? City council knew best.

### **Pointing Toward The Polar Star**



Within one hour after Monterey City Council's contentious Jan. 19 meeting ended at 1 a.m. vice mayor Libby Downey was getting e-mail from people upset by the negative 3-2 vote. She commented at the next City Council meeting on Jan. 27, "When I went to church, I felt like I was going to be crucified." So, I contacted her.

Downey told me, "I received the e-mails the next couple of days. I went to church (Monterey Presbyterian) on Sunday and heard that many thought I was not supportive of the homeless population."

*Vice Mayor Libby Downey*

The retired public health nurse with concern for the underserved members of the community went to the Methodist church to personally check conditions reported as unsafe by neighbors because the area was being used for camping in the adjacent lot to the Union Bank; also, a resident voiced concern for the women.

"I felt--since the traveling homeless would be using the same porta-potty the women would use--that mixing the two groups of people seemed unsafe," Downey said. "It also could invite more of the travelers to join and camp in the area. These travelers have been described as aggressive." Downey witnessed empty liquor containers, trash, and human excrement.

Her findings inspired Downey to seek an update from staff pertaining to efforts identifying a new location for a Safe Parking Program and to direct staff to draft an Urgency Ordinance to Amend Zoning Code Section 38-126 to address the shelter crisis by principally permitting Safe Parking Programs in city parking lots and setting forth the facts constituting such urgency.

The two items were added to the agenda of the Planning Commission meeting on Wed., Jan. 27 and city council voted 5-0 in favor.

I attended that meeting and heard reports on actions taken by the city, which included checking city-owned parking lots as possible sites for the One Starfish Safe Parking Program. The police parking lot and others were ruled out by limitations in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires level ground and a level path to the porta-potty, as well as an oversized porta-potty to handle wheelchairs. The search continues.

Vice mayor Downey advised me that although several churches are currently participating in I-Help programs throughout Monterey without use permits, the city has no plan to enforce such violations, but does ask each participating church to apply for a use permit.

Representatives from two churches away from the area frequented by travelers offered their sites for One Starfish Safe Parking and I-Help, and Rev. Cindy Storrs, pastor of First Methodist Church invited the six women of One Starfish to sleep inside the church rather than in the parking lot.

The Urgency Ordinance was heard for the second time at the regular meeting of Monterey City Council on Tues., Feb. 2 and passed with a 5-0 vote. Details will be forthcoming in future columns.

Monterey is vindicated. As Buddha and Confucius might say, “Let sleeping dragons lie and celebrate with a delicious Chinese meal on Mon., Feb. 8, Chinese New Year—kicking off the Year of the Monkey.”



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Chinese Dragons from Buddhist Symbols (Google); Happy Chinese New Year from Freepik/Free Vector (Google); Photo of Libby Downey from her Facebook page; all images used for educational/illustrative purposes; no copyright infringement intended.

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