

# What fate lies in store for Civic Auditorium?

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SANTA CRUZ — The Civic Auditorium can become a first-class home for the performing arts, with or without basketball. As for rock 'n roll, it's here to stay.

A team of consultants hired by the city and Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County to look into renovating the 45-year-old downtown landmark presented its final report Tuesday to a study group of city, county and cultural officials.

The \$30,000 study, prepared by Theatre Projects Consultants Limited of New York and ELS Design Group of Berkeley, outlined four alternatives for the multi-purpose facility, constructed as a W.P.A. project during the Franklin Roosevelt administration.

The alternatives ranged from "scheme one," a bare-bones, \$2.2-million plan to improve seating, sight lines and restroom facilities in the hall, to "scheme four," a \$10.4-million plan to construct a 900-seat theater in the parking lot next to the auditorium while doing minor refurbishing to the current facility.

In between was "scheme two," an innovative \$6-million-plus plan which would incorporate movable seating "towers" within the auditorium space. The towers could produce variable seating capacities and stage configurations, all with the ambience and acoustics lacking in current Civic Auditorium events.

"Scheme three," for a cost of \$9.2

million, also would incorporate the movable towers. In addition, it would enlarge the stage area, but 200 seats would be lost.

The City Council will consider the alternatives at its meeting Sept. 10.

Jack Baskin of the local Civic Auditorium Technical Advisory Committee, which had selected the consultants, said his group voted in favor of "scheme four." But the group had not seen information indicating the two-theater facility would probably cost twice as much to operate each year — \$400,000 as compared to \$200,000 for a single facility.

With that information, Baskin said he suspected the committee's vote would have gone in favor of "scheme two."

Movable towers have been used successfully in the Northampton Theater in England. A presentation by the ELS Design Group included slides of the Northampton facility, showing a variety of seating and stage arrangements within the theater space.

In addition to questions of building and operating costs for the various proposals, City Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams expressed concern that high school basketball, one of the major activities in the current auditorium, might be displaced under at least two of the proposals.

City Parks and Recreation Department staff indicated the games — including the traditional Dad's Club tournament which serves as a major fund-raiser for the high school

sport — could be relocated. Marell High School's team is a major user of the court, but Marell spectators never number more than a few hundred in the cavernous hall.

"A lot of high school basketball games are played to 2,000 empty seats," observed one of the speakers. "It's a very inefficient use of space."

Seating capacities under the proposals were 1,754 for "scheme one," 1,880 for "scheme two," 1,682 for "scheme three," and 2,900 for the two-theater "scheme four."

Thomas C. Mitze, production director for the La Mirada Civic Theater, also worked with the design consultants in considering programming requirements and possibilities under the various proposals.

Mitze said the Santa Cruz market for culture — or the size of audiences that would turn out here — is miniscule, compared with larger metropolitan areas. Even a new, improved Civic will not be able to generate sufficient profits to attract large touring companies or musical superstars.

Currently, rock concerts are the Civic's biggest moneymakers.

"Rock groups are the most commercially viable groups using it," said Mitze, "and they are the least interested in renovating."

All of the new proposals were designed to enable the Civic to continue housing rock shows — although Mitze said promoters wouldn't be pleased with any decrease in the hall's current capacity of 1,950.