

# City Council approves \$6 million plan to renovate Civic Auditorium

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SANTA CRUZ — City Council members Tuesday approved a master plan for the renovation of the Civic Auditorium estimated to cost \$6 million.

The plan — one of four schemes proposed by design consultants and the Auditorium's Technical Advisory Committee — allows seating areas to be small or large, depending on the type of event.

This flexibility is considered a key feature. About 1,800 existing seats can be kept in one large area for certain events. Or, with the use of

moving towers carried on air casters, the seating area can be reduced to 800-1,000 seats for a more intimate, theater atmosphere.

Acoustics, lighting, other equipment and performing areas would also be improved.

Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams urged her colleagues to keep their minds open to one of the other schemes — a \$10.3 million renovation considered to be a pie-in-the-sky option. This plan calls for construction of a new 900-seat cultural facility on the auditorium parking lot.

Council members agreed to take

one more "quick look" at the \$10.3 million option before settling on the \$6 million plan.

In five years, said Sears-Williams, the more expensive plan may be "more appropriate" than the \$6 million scheme.

Councilwoman Jane Weed commented the expensive plan is "the best of all worlds," but she cautioned against spending too much time and money "dividing our resources" by looking at two plans instead of one.

Financing of the \$6 million project "will be a big enough challenge as it is," added Weed.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt com-

mented "the best of all worlds" is to actually move forward on one plan and start laying the groundwork for financing and construction. "The sooner we can focus on one plan the better," commented Wormhoudt.

They directed committee members to continue work with consultants, ELS Design Group and Theater Projects, and with city staff members on a financing plan for the \$6 million project.

Several months ago, committee members voted to recommend the \$10.3 million scheme. But committee

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members changed their minds after a July report showed operating costs for the different options.

That report indicated the annual operating deficit for the more expensive project would be as much as \$400,000 compared to \$200,000 for the cheaper project. The existing operating deficit is \$100,000, according to committee chairman Jack Baskin.

The \$10.3 million project would

have provided a new "first class" theater, plus retain all existing uses at the auditorium, said Baskin.

Committee members were intrigued by the "originality and boldness" of this plan, he said.

However, Baskin said the project marketing consultant raised "serious questions" as to whether Santa Cruz could support two major facilities at this time — another reason why committee members switched to backing the less ex-

pensive plan.

Committee members are "still intrigued" by the more costly plan, said Baskin, "but made our change based on the realities of economics."

The third option called for minimal refurbishing at an estimated cost of \$2.2 million, but was considered to do little to improve the atmosphere for theater performances or to improve the stage and backstage.

The fourth option included the features of the \$6 million plan, but added improvements for a deeper, wider and higher stage, at an estimated total cost of \$9.3 million.

The council will receive a progress report from the committee at a later meeting.