

Local news

Farmers Market site weighed

Downtown group supports location near City Hall

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SANTA CRUZ — Within the next couple of months, residents may be able to buy produce, pick up show tickets and complain to City Hall every Wednesday without having to walk more than a few steps.

Directors of the Downtown Association unanimously endorsed a proposal Tuesday to move the Farmers Market to Church Street in front of the Civic Auditorium. "It's the most viable option at this point," said Jim Mullen, a member of the board of directors. "But we need more information."

That information will come from city staffers, some of whom already have raised concerns about closing Church Street between the Redevelopment Agency

building and Center Street, in addition to using the Civic Auditorium's parking lot.

Jim Lang, director of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, said he would be concerned about closing the parking lot on days when auditorium shows were being set up.

Big rigs and buses filled with equipment use the parking lot door, which is closest to the stage, to unload equipment.

"We don't have the ability to say it will never happen on a Wednesday," Lang said. "And, like any other business downtown, we have to cater to our customers."

Lang also worried that taking away parking from the lot and on-street would displace a significant number of employee cars. These would be parked in the surrounding neighborhood, which would reduce the amount of parking available to Farmers Market customers.

The City Council must approve the Downtown Association's proposal to relocate the Farmers Market, which has become a popular downtown attraction every Wednesday.

The market must move from its current Lincoln Street site because the city plans to begin a lengthy

reconstruction project on the road and sidewalks sometime this spring. Equipment also will be parked at the lot where much of the market now sets up.

Downtown business owners have been reluctant to move the market to any site where it would be near stores because of the entourage it attracts. These include homeless people being fed at the free food giveaway, wandering Deadheads, skateboarders and other young people who cause problems for neighboring businesses.

Mayor Mike Rotkin, who attended the Downtown Association's meeting Tuesday, said he believes the police crackdown begun over the weekend on the illegal activity in the area bounded by Cathcart Street, Pacific Avenue and Center Street may ease these problems unfairly attributed to the Farmers Market.

"It's worth at least seeing what happens on Wednesday," Rotkin said. "It doesn't have to have the level of problems associated with it. ... You don't have to accept the fact that the Farmers Market is 'a problem.'"

The crackdown at the parking lot, known as "Hippie Corner," not only included police looking for illegal drug activity, but also parking officials writing tickets for vehicles parked too long and animal-control officers making sure all dogs are licensed.