

✓ Pacific Avenue

# SC council will discuss downtown host fees

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2-1-94  
SANTA CRUZ — A downtown host program — part police, part public relations — has a home on Pacific Avenue, support from downtown merchants and some funding.

Next week, another large piece of the proposal is expected to fall into place: formation of an assessment district for downtown businesses to pay the rest.

The half-dozen hosts, clad in polo shirts and khaki shorts, on the streets are supposed to address problems downtown, including panhandling, graffiti, vandalism, littering and loitering, said Kevin Melrose, a downtown property owner.

The goal is to reassure the public that downtown is safe, secure and friendly, said Melrose.

At the same time, the hosts are to function as "ambassadors to the public," providing directions and information on history and downtown events. They will operate from the former Delmarette Cafe on Pacific Avenue, which has been leased to the city by United Artists for \$1 a year.

They will have no police authority. But they will be trained and supervised by the Santa Cruz Police Department and will attend police roll calls, according to Pat Calvert of the Downtown Association.

"They are not security people," said Melrose, but will have a "soft approach" to panhandlers and loiterers with backup from police.

The program has received \$20,000 in start-up funds from the city, and the promise of lease revenue generated by the downtown kiosks. The Downtown Association has kicked in another \$5,000.

## Downtown-host assessment

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Approximately \$55,000 is expected to be raised by an assessment district of downtown properties, according to Melrose, who said the proposal has been endorsed by a majority of the property owners. The Santa Cruz City Council will consider forming the assessment district at its Feb. 8 meeting.

If approved by the council and property owners, whose average cost would be between \$300 to \$400 annually, the hosts will be on the street in about eight months, said Melrose.

The hosts are among several tactics under consideration to change public perception and erase prob-

lems downtown. The City Council recently approved hiring a county mental-health worker to help substance abusers, troubled youth and the mentally ill. New city ordinances are being drafted to crack down on loiterers and panhandlers.

The hosts, who will be recruited through Cabrillo College's law enforcement program, may carry public nuisance and code-violation checklists that can be filed with police or other agencies, according to the program proposal.

Calvert said she hopes to hire people trained in first aid and CPR who are also bilingual. The job will pay \$7.50 an hour.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel  
Kevin Melrose speaks.