

Convention Center Plans Advance

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Development of a convention center at Lighthouse Point is at the "rapid movement stage now," and some critical questions on operating such a facility must be answered soon, directors of the Santa Cruz County Convention and Visitors Bureau were told Thursday.

Dave Koester, Santa Cruz city manager and secretary to the Joint Powers Authority which is spearheading the convention project, said the authority has made a commitment to go ahead with the center, regardless of whether a federal grant is forthcoming.

However, he added that some vital answers to how it will be financed and who will be responsible for its operation must be considered soon. The bureau answered that it will form a committee to study the matter immediately.

Koester said the authority

"hasn't given up hope" that a \$900,000 grant for the center may be released by the Economic Development Administration, but went on to say the authority is proceeding with studies for a \$3 million center (about \$1.6 million of which would be spent for actual construction), whether or not the grant is released.

Koester said decisions on features of the center, its design and office-exhibit space were needed soon because plans for the center are about ready to begin.

"Formal agreements between the authority and financial and legal consultants have already been made for a bond sale," Koester said. But he added no definite financial proposals can be made until plans (expected to cost about \$150,000) for the center are completed.

The city manager emphasized it is necessary for the center to operate on a self-supporting

basis, and not expect help from tax revenues, especially since Santa Cruz is wondering how to balance a 1970-71 budget that is some \$50,000 in the "red."

Financing of the center is conceived to be from room tax revenues and operation-rental of the center itself.

"Exhibit space is revenue and office space is overhead," director Ken Ferguson said, adding that some convention groups like a facility with at least 36,000 square feet.

Koester questioned whether the center, with a \$3 million bond sale, could be much more than 30,000 square feet. He said the center would have to be built with "expansion possibilities," in case a federal grant is released at a later date.

Robert Ward, president of the bureau, said he was pleased to see the authority going ahead with its plans for construction because "this will be an additional benefit to the community."

Director Al McCommon said that talk on the center up to now has been discussed as a "pipe dream," but "it is very real now."

Aside from financial operation, the bureau recognized decisions on whether a person, the bureau itself, or a city-bureau combination should be responsible for the center's operation.

Such questions will need answers in the near future, directors said.

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