

Farmers market sees major changes

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WATSONVILLE — The downtown Farmers Market will soon spread onto Main Street, be open later, and have many more vendors.

Those are some of the changes consultant Vance Corum is implementing in order to bolster the market's popularity and clientele.

"It's a Catch-22," Corum told Watsonville city council members Tuesday night. "People say prices are too high. People want to see several vendors selling each prod-

uct. We need to figure out a way to jump the size of the market. We're not seeing enough volume and competition. We want to expand both sides of the equation at the same time."

Toward that end, Corum and others have been contacting potential vendors — both farmers and sellers of non-food products — and asking them to sell at the market on a trial basis.

He is also changing the hours of the market from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m. to 4 to 8 p.m. Fridays in order to

See MARKET, page 10

MARKET

From page 1

allow more working people to visit the market and to turn it into a social gathering place.

In addition, Corum plans to block off one lane on Main Street and expand the market from its current site on Peck Street to Main in order to give it more visibility and credibility.

"Closing one lane of Main sends the message of how important the market is to city," councilman Rafael Lopez commented.

Leaders also plan to schedule regular entertainment events in the area to help draw families downtown. The first of those events is a salsa tasting and salsa dancing extravaganza scheduled for Friday.

Officials also plan to work to battle the public's perception that there is a dearth of parking places near the plaza, possibly by posting signs directing shoppers to parking lots or by having high school students do the same.

Officials will also work to alleviate the fear that the downtown area is unsafe by making sure security officers are visible at the market.

Other possible attractions to the market could include a "Chef in the Market" program — sponsored by the Register-Pajaronian — where shoppers could watch gourmet meals being prepared by master cooks.

City council members praised Corum's work and approved \$12,000 in additional funding for the market.