

✓ Palm trees cut from streetscape plan

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SANTA CRUZ — The great downtown palm tree debate has come down to this:

No way.

City Council members have decided palm trees just weren't what they had in mind for a redesigned downtown Santa Cruz.

Perhaps Councilman John Mahaney said it best during the discussion of the streetscape plan Tuesday night.

"I'm not into palm trees. Once a palm tree grows all you see is a stalk ... with some fluff on top."

The palms were just a small part of the overall plan, but from them some of the biggest debates sprouted.

Overall, the council liked the streetscape plan, and approved it unanimously with these stipulations:

- Take another look at the one-block area at the Pacific/Cooper intersection in front of the proposed movie/retail complex on the old Gottschalks site.

That's where the eight palm trees had been proposed because of a desire to create a different "spacial element" and because the sidewalk is at its narrowest there.

The council asked for a new design that incorporates something other than palm trees.

- Look for ways to cut costs, particularly on the trash cans, kiosks and benches.

"I don't want to be a public official who approves a \$1,100 trash can ... unless I'm in the Army now," quipped Councilman Neal Coonerty.

The preliminary \$4.2 million budget also includes four 12-foot square kiosks at a cost of \$100,000 each, and 54 benches at \$1,300 each.

- Find samples of higher and longer benches.

Mahaney was concerned that elderly people might have trouble getting up from the lower benches.

- Check out the possibility of finding ways to save the approximately 20 trees that either still are alive downtown or

that would survive the underground construction work planned later this year.

- Ask the Downtown Commission to recommend a public restroom program, and suggest places where they should be built.

- Find spots for water fountains.

- Make sure everyone knows that raised grades at the intersections that meet the curbs is a priority with the council.

- Buy local material and hire local workers for the project whenever possible.

Discussion Tuesday was kicked off by Sue Powell, a member of the Streetscape Committee.

"This design will move with the community of Santa Cruz into the future," said Powell. "This design was intentionally chosen to provide a unifying theme to the street."

Following her was Brandon Cornell, another committee member, who asked the council to approve everything about the plan except the palm trees.

"I have a personal disdain for the palm as a landscaping tool ... particularly in the downtown Santa Cruz environment," said Cornell.

But Mark Primack, a member of Vision Santa Cruz, supported the trees.

Overall, the plan generally calls for plane trees to line one side of Pacific Avenue, with a flowering tree on the other.

Special treatment is given to the Cooper Street area, and south of Cathcart there will be a median strip planted with trees. In this area, a third kind of "stately" tree will be planted.

Shopowners will be encouraged to landscape the fronts of their buildings. There also will be flower beds under each of the trees.

Boris Dramov of ROMA Design Group said he hopes the council will finalize the plan in time for bids to be sought in early September.

That timeline calls for the contract to be awarded in November, and construction to start in January. Completion is scheduled for June 1992.