

BUDGET CRISIS

Santa Cruz votes to keep Amgen cycling race

Bicycle Races

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SANTA CRUZ — The Amgen Tour of California appears on track to return to Santa Cruz after the City Council voted against a recommendation from the city manager to cut funding for the event.

After hearing from a long line of race supporters who vowed to fundraise so that the race wouldn't cost the general fund a dime, the City Council voted to sign a "host city agreement" with organizers

of the Tour de France-style event, which raises money for cancer research.

"Tourism is such an important aspect to this community," said Michael Burns, an avid cyclist and Santa Cruz resident who urged the council to stop thinking about current money problems and imagine the tourism dollars the race has the potential to bring to town. "This is world exposure Santa Cruz will be getting. It's huge."

But with the city dealing with a budget deficit, the City Council

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seemed prepared to vote against the event. So far this month, the city has used employee furloughs, layoffs and position cuts to trim \$9.2 million from its budget.

With all the cost-cutting, Councilman Don Lane was uneasy

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Thomas Peterson, left, and Levi Leipheimer make the turn onto Mission Street as Amgen Tour of California riders head toward downtown Santa Cruz earlier this year.

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RACE

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about bringing the race to town again.

"We're really putting a lot of special commitment toward tourism and that kind of economic development," he said. "On the

down side, we're assuming it's going to pay off at a certain level and it may not."

Last year was the tour's first stop in Santa Cruz. The 800-mile stage race, which featured famed cyclist and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong, started in Davis and ended in Escondido.

The race drew 15,000 to 20,000 spectators to down-

town Santa Cruz in rainy February weather.

But the tour presented several challenges, as well. For example, hotels lost out on customers because the next leg of the race began in San Jose and the teams, as well as many spectators, packed up and drove over the hill after arriving in Santa Cruz.

Another downside was that Santa Cruz's Amgen Tour supporters only had five months to prepare, organize merchandise and raise money to offset the city's costs, an estimated \$79,700 shelled out for staff time, including police overtime.

Things are different this year, race supporters told the council. The race has been

moved to May (coinciding with Bike Week) with a possible stage finish at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk on May 18. Second, the later date means local race supporters now have 10 months to raise money, line up sponsors, organize finish-line events and order merchandise.

In the end, the council voted unanimously to for-

mally send in an application to have the race come through Santa Cruz.

In other action Tuesday, the council voted to extend a 45-day moratorium on marijuana dispensaries and grow facilities for six months in order to complete a study about the ramifications of adding more in the city.