

Fate of SV Tree Circus 11-8-83 remains up in the air

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SCOTTS VALLEY — The fate of the Tree Circus still is uncertain following a second public hearing at a Planning Commission meeting Monday.

The Planning Commission made no decision on the unique trees, but voted 4-1 to recommend the City Council form a committee to study them. Commissioner Rick Bowen voted against the motion.

It also continued the public hearing until Dec. 12.

Although revision of the city tree ordinance is under consideration by the Planning Commission, it is unclear whether the Tree Circus can be considered 'heritage trees' as defined by that ordinance. The trees are not native to the area.

"The city does not have the money to purchase the property," Hal Medo, chairman of the commission says. "I'm hoping someone with the cash will buy it and donate the land to the city."

Medo says it is not known whether the county or the state are interested in purchasing the land.

City Planning Director Yuchuek Hsia says the Tree Circus would not fall under the Cultural Ordinance now being incorporated into the general plan revision process.

Mark Primaack, who has been fighting for the protection of the Tree Circus for the past six years, says "I would never dream of entrusting the safety and preservation of those trees with the city of Scotts Valley. They can't even take care of the one park they have."

The Tree Circus was a collection of living trees grafted into intricate forms by the late Axel Erlandson, who began the project in 1946. By 1957 his collection had grown to 60 living trees. Erlandson and his wife had intended to develop the Tree Circus into a tourist attraction similar to the Mystery Spot.

However, the idea did not catch on. In 1963 Erlandson sold the Tree Circus and the property was developed as the Lost World with replicas of dinosaurs overshadowing the grafted trees. The present owner bought the property when the Lost World did not make it as a tourist attraction.

The property is currently owned by Robert Hogan, who bought the land in 1977 for commercial development.

The property has 100 feet of Scotts Valley Drive frontage. Hogan has told city officials and Primaack that he would be happy to sit on the land for another four or five years until he gets top dollar for the commercial property.

Primaack labeled the Planning Commission and the City Council as "not willing to make the first gesture toward acknowledging their value."

He has been approaching the Planning Commission, Chamber of Commerce and the City Council informally for the past six years on the tree issue. He calls it "a Catch-22 situation."

No one is willing to step in and save the Tree Circus, he says.

Primaack, a graduate of the Rhodes Island School of Design and the Architec-

tural Association of London, saw the trees when he visited his sister in Scotts Valley in 1977.

He has been trying to save them since then.

According to Primaack, they have been featured in various domestic and foreign journals within the past year. He said last year a British corporation had attempted to purchase the land but was unsuccessful.