

Opinion

1-30-78

Sentinel Editorial

Convention Center

Center Dilemma

For more than a decade, Santa Cruzans have been working on plans to develop a conference-convention center complex to enhance the community's ability to attract conventions and provide additional community resources.

The initial project centered on developing property on West Cliff Drive near Lighthouse Point for the center which would have included a hotel and a convention center.

Later the project was rejected by the voters and failed to obtain support from the coastal commission.

More recently a committee has been at work studying other sites in the community with a goal of combining a convention center with a performing arts facility.

Obviously, if the projects could be combined they could utilize common parking, etc.

However, even such a combination would require a fairly sizeable piece of property.

Two sites have been recommended for further study. A site near Bay Street and West Cliff Drive and a site in the Neary Lagoon area.

While both sites have possibilities, neither is a prime site for a major complex if you are considering a convention center, a performing arts facility and a major hotel.

The West Cliff Drive site would be sufficient for a convention center, but it is questionable if it would meet the needs for the other facilities.

Neary Lagoon holds promise for a community facility which could include a performing arts center and allied facilities such as a museum, an aquarium, public recreational areas, etc.

It is questionable if the Neary Lagoon site would be suitable for a hotel to the point it would attract a private investor.

There is a second question of fairly major concern regarding sizes. In a convention center, an auditorium capable of seating 500 to 750 persons would be sufficient.

Whether that is the same size suitable for a performing arts center remains questionable as both UCSC and Cabrillo have facilities seating about 500 persons.

Thus, if you were to build a larger center, it might have to be considered as a separate project.

The Civic Auditorium seats between 1,100 and 2,000, depending on the type of show, but admittedly it leaves a great deal to be desired as a performing arts unit.

Then comes the matter of money.

Neither a convention center or a performing arts center rates as a profit-making venture. Both require major subsidies if they are to be properly operated and maintained.

We believe the community can use both facilities, but whether we can afford them is something else.

The convention center would certainly help our visitor and convention business. We aren't going to remain in the convention business on a major scale without additional facilities.

The community could also use a performing arts center, preferably one with more than one auditorium. It should also have the amenities necessary for the success of such a building.

In this regard, the combination with a convention center makes good sense.

The problem of financing the projects remains a big question. There is no doubt they would require a substantial public investment.

The studies should be continued with more consideration centered on our ability to finance the projects, or, at least, determine what the public cost would be.