

Thrill ride OK'd

City unanimously approves 125-foot Boardwalk addition

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SANTA CRUZ — For a thrill ride that hasn't even been built yet, the Double Shot has caused a whole lot of screaming and yelling.

But the City Council drew mostly applause Tuesday night when it voted to let the Seaside Co. put up the tallest ride in the nearly 100-year-history of the Beach Boardwalk amusement park.

The 7½-foot-wide, 125-foot-high tower will lift, then drop, 12 shrieking passengers at once. It is 55 feet shorter than a 1996 proposal that the city's Zoning Board approved, but which the Seaside Co. decided not to pursue after four appeals were filed against the decision.

Supportive residents, who made up most of the overflow crowd, hailed it as a revenue-building measure in a cash-strapped city that recently chopped \$6 million from its budget. The few critics in the chambers denounced it as a view-ruining, bird-squashing blight.

One critic said it's silly for the Boardwalk to think it's competing with landlocked amusement parks when its beachside location is a far bigger draw than any thrill ride could ever be.

Councilwoman Emily Reilly said the latest plan reflects community concerns about the earlier proposal.

"It's lower, narrower, it's see-through, the color is different and the lights will be off when the park is closed."

Council members called it a reasonable plan that could generate desperately needed tax revenue for the city, particularly the 5 percent admissions tax the city takes from the park's annual gross.

The Seaside Co. now needs the approval of the state Coastal Commission before it can proceed with the \$1.6 million project, but council members said the agency has responded positively to the proposal.

Former Seaside employee Tony Ybarra of Sunnyvale said the family-run, local-

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ly owned park must be allowed to increase revenues or it could fail and be snapped up by a corporate giant.

"You have one of the last independent amusement parks," he said. "If there are things you don't like about the Boardwalk, wait until Six Flags comes to town," he said.

To date, there are more than 2 pounds of pro-and-con correspondence on file about the tower.

The environmental group Pelican Network, led by ex-Santa Cruzan Jack Ellwanger, orchestrated an e-mail campaign that resulted in hundreds of messages to the council from as far away as New Jersey, many of them saying the ride "is very inappropriate for such a forward-thinking city."

After Ellwanger called the tower "an atrocity" and "obscenely ugly," Councilman Mark Primack said that comment seemed irrelevant when coming from a bird-oriented group. "What does 'ugly' have to do with pelicans, or the aesthetic judgments of pelicans?" he remarked.

The ride, according to the Seaside Co., would be lit only from below, with no lights on the actual tower. The lights at the base would be shut down when the park closes for the night.

The owners also agreed to paint it white to better blend in with the sky.

Seaside Co. had to go before the city because the ride far exceeds the 40-foot height limitation for structures in the commercial zone.

The council's decision overrules the Jan. 15 denial of the application by the city Planning Commission.

While the tower would be almost

60 feet higher than the Giant Dipper, currently the tallest structure in the park, it would be puny in comparison to the drop-tower attractions at other parks.

Great America's Drop Zone Stunt Tower in Santa Clara is 100 feet higher.

Seaside Co. has emphasized it isn't trying to go head-to-head with the larger parks, but that it needs to build new rides to bring back

repeat customers.

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