

TREES

Mall tree rescue proves tough

Difficulty may bury transplant plans

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SANTA CRUZ — It isn't easy being green. Just ask city parks workers.

Crews spent five days and thousands of dollars scooping out a copper beech tree in front of the Neary Building and saving it for replanting at the new Locust/Cedar parking garage.

And that doesn't bode well for the other doomed trees on Pacific Avenue.

"Our initial goal was to try to salvage as many trees as possible, but what has happened is because of a variety of reasons that number has been reduced," said Jim Lang, director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

The reconstruction of Pacific Avenue calls for removal of all the trees and plants now on the mall. Replacement trees have been purchased.

Parks officials originally thought some of the trees in the planters could be transplanted because their roots wouldn't be entangled in the web of pipes under Pacific Avenue.

But the time and trouble spent on the copper beech before it was craned to its new home Wednesday morning has dimmed even that optimism.

Dave Rosener, field leader of the downtown parks crew, which helped the city's tree crew remove the copper beech, said the project was unexpectedly difficult.

"If this is how hard it is, I don't think we'll be saving many more trees," said Rosener. "This was our most ambitious effort."

Lang agreed with Rosener's assessment.

"Given enough time and money, you could do quite a few things," said Lang. "The question is, is it worth the time and money?"

Rosener said the tree saved by the crews would cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000 if purchased at its current maturity.

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City workers have been transplanting as many shrubs and small trees as possible — with construction crews following in their wake tearing up the road to replace ancient pipes below.

"We've moved quite a bit of stuff," said Lang. "Things that could be done with hand labor and a pickup truck."

He said the city had hoped to move some of the mall's cedar trees before the construction project moved north, but found the limbs were too brittle.

That made the plan to uproot them and lay them in a flat-bed truck unfeasible, said Lang.

A nursery owner in Gilroy had expressed interest in uprooting and taking some of the trees, said Lang, but the city has not heard back, despite repeated calls.

"That's when we decided to go on our own" and transplant the copper beech, said Lang. "But this is something really out of our expertise."

Rosener said this was the first time he had worked on such a project.

"I've never transplanted anything taller than my own head," said Rosener. "It was a great experience."

Lang said the copper beech was selected because "it's a more unusual tree on the mall."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A crane lowers the tree to a spot at Locust and Cedar streets.