

A-4—Tuesday, June 12, 1990 — Santa Cruz Sentinel

Task force examines mall street people

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Street people on the mall, and a specific plan for rebuilding were two key issues addressed by the Vision Santa Cruz Task Force on rebuilding the downtown in Santa Cruz Monday night.

They went along with a recommendation by Councilman John Laird which is aimed at resolving the socially sticky problem of street people on the mall.

Task force members also agreed to form a smaller, "Technical Advisory Group" that will develop a specific plan for rebuilding.

By an unanimous voice vote, the task force moved to allow the Executive Board of Vision Santa Cruz to appoint five "predominantly business community" members to a committee on the street people issue that Laird has volunteered to reconvene.

Laird's committee to deal with social issues on the mall was formed prior to the quake and had been scheduled to meet Oct. 18, the day after the earthquake.

Left undecided was whether a representative of the street community itself should participate, although task force members Bruce Van Allen and Mary Thuerwachter argued for their inclusion.

"As long as we only talk about the problem as opposed to dealing with people who are working with the problem, we're not going to be making any progress," Thuerwachter said.

However, former Councilman Mike Rotkin argued against the idea.

"What I understand this issue to be about is certain kinds of illegal and anti-social behavior. You're not going to go out and find a panhandler to serve on the committee. As far as I'm concerned, as soon as they identify themselves as panhandlers, they should be arrested."

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said it would behoove the Laird task force to take the concerns of those on the street into consideration.

"I cannot imagine they'd be foolish enough to try to develop plans that affect people's lives without consulting them," she said.

The Vision Santa Cruz task force representatives will be named at a meeting of the executive committee set for June 20.

It took the better part of one hour for them to decide on the makeup of the Technical Advisory Group, a panel of those with the expertise needed to develop a workable rebuilding plan, commission an environmental review and hire a consultant, that incorporates the so-called First Principals of the Vision Santa Cruz Task Force.

A suggestion to appoint only three downtown property owners or their representatives to a nine-member group was criticized on both sides. There were those who thought more community members should be appointed, and those who argued for more property owners.

Philip Boyce, chief executive officer of Pacific Western Bank, argued for action.

"We're sending a message with our lack of a decision that is terribly detrimental to this community," he said, noting it has been nearly nine months since the quake. "The reality is, if we can't make a decision, we can't put a plan together and we can't proceed with anything."

"In most cases like this, the City Council would form as a redevelopment agency and would take some input, but proceed pretty much unilaterally (with rebuilding plans)," he said. "You got to have faith in the people you appoint, then you've got to get on with it..."

"I'm telling you that I have met with enough investment people that if you don't get on with it," he continued. "You'll continue getting what you have now, piecemeal development downtown. It's not that it's they're bad or good plans. But until an environmental impact report is done, no investment person in his right mind is going to get involved, and investment cycles are such that it might be another year before they can commit money again."

Ultimately, the task force agreed with a recommendation by Wormhoudt to have the Downtown Business Association appoint four property owners, and one member involved in retail sales, to go along with one city council member, a Vision Santa Cruz member, city staffers, and Boyce.