

Merchants want 'winos' put in slammer

By KATHARINE BALL
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The merchants of downtown Santa Cruz are fed up what they are calling the winos and drug users who hang out on the Pacific Garden Mall, and they would like them locked up somewhere.

That was the message given to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors in a public hearing on jail crowding yesterday.

The supervisors are trying to qualify the county for state money to build a new 64-bed medium security jail at the jail farm on Harkins Slough Road near Watsonville.

The main jail on Water Street is currently housing an average of about 100 prisoners more a day than it has beds to accommodate.

Sheriff Al Noren said the county needs the new 64-bed jail, and more, to accommodate the projected increase in criminals as the county's

population grows.

While downtown Santa Cruz merchants and Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt were happy about the location of the new jail — far from downtown Santa Cruz — they said they feared it would not accommodate enough criminals to address the problem of public inebriates on the mall.

"We are developing a consistent, year-round group of public inebriates," Wormhoudt said. "Word is out that there are no particular repercussions (for inebriation in Santa Cruz)."

The lack of response to the problem is partially due to the severe jail overcrowding, she indicated. Wormhoudt urged the county to build a jail specially designed to house drunks.

She said she had recently talked to a Santa Cruz police officer who had to decide whether to arrest a drunken man passed out on a down-

town sidewalk. While the policeman's work on the arrest might take 90 minutes to finish, the drunk might be back on the street even faster, Wormhoudt said.

Carol Fuller, owner of

in an 11-month period.

Wormhoudt and others said the current problem with public inebriation is exacerbated by the location of the main county jail, on Water Street, just two blocks from

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Trader Tots on Pacific Avenue, said the county should jail "people who look like they're never going to be contributing members of society."

Terry Spodick, president of the Downtown Association, said that 18 people had accounted for 424 arrests for public inebriation on the mall

the mall. That is where drunks are currently taken to "dry out."

Other speakers urged the supervisors to search for more humane ways to treat offenders such as chronic inebriates.

Ellie Greenwood, director of Friends Outside, a group that tries to help inmates and

their families, said she was opposed to building any more jails.

Instead, she said, the county should try to develop treatment programs that would help repeat offenders change their lives.

But Jack Bassett, chief of the Santa Cruz Police, said, "The people we have lodged in jail now are habitual failures. They've been in and out of programs." He, too, encouraged the county to build a special drunk tank.

"Criminals follow the path of least resistance," Bassett said. "Currently the path of least resistance is in Santa Cruz County."

He said the county was attracting more and more criminals.

The supervisors said they were sympathetic to the problems described, but wondered whether they could come up with the cash to address them.

While the county is currently seeking \$1.3 million from state jail bonds issued a few years ago to build the 64-bed jail on Harkins Slough Road, Noren said the supervisors should also go after money from new bonds just approved by state voters in June. That money might pay for a larger jail at the jail farm, he said.

The supervisors indicated they would try to get some of the money.

At Supervisor Gary Patton's direction, the county will also look into new alternative programs to incarceration as soon as possible.

Those programs could include expansion of the county parole program; electronic home surveillance, in which convicted criminals are tagged with electric monitoring devices and confined to their own homes; more drug treatment programs; and sentencing to community service.