

9-13-77 At Jail Site

Downtown SC Convention Idea

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Recommendations for an "urban convention center" in downtown Santa Cruz were made Monday by Supervisor Gary Patton, who led the successful drive to stop a convention center at Lighthouse Field four years ago.

Patton's urban center and hotel complex would be located along the west side of Front Street, between Cooper Street and Soquel Avenue, according to a report he made to the Conference-Performing Arts Committee Monday afternoon.

It would include turning Front Street into a mall, possibly similar to the Pacific Garden Mall.

Patton pointed out that nearly all of the acreage in the proposed area is in public ownership, including the site of the Front Street Jail (to be replaced with a jail on Water Street across from the courthouse), and adjacent parking lots.

He told the committee that possibly the county would be willing to donate a parcel of land to a hotel developer in that area. That decision would be in the hands of a majority of the board of supervisors.

"Santa Cruz County, or at least the north county, is dependent economically on tourism," Patton told The Sentinel, "and we should use it wisely."

He earlier has indicated that such management should include provisions for getting visitors out of their cars and into public transportation during their stays here.

The committee—composed of representatives of the city council, board of supervisors, and a number of interested organizations—accepted Patton's proposal for consideration.

Committee Chairman Barbara Klein, director of the County Convention and Visitors Bureau, reported the committee will be looking at other proposals during coming months.

An earlier report to the Santa Cruz City Council by Keyser-Marston indicated that a convention center should be located near the ocean to use that natural resource as a drawing card.

Patton said the Pacific Avenue Garden Mall—and possibly the Front Street mall—would be strong drawing cards and an uplift to the downtown business community.

He said the convention center should be able to accommodate groups up to 1,000 persons, noting that "80 per cent of conventions are in the 1,000 or less range."

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Patton is suggesting the hotel "be able to handle at least as many people as Holiday Inn" on Ocean Street.

Also, the hotel lobby would be connected to the Pacific Garden Mall's shopping area, according to Patton's suggestions.

Prior to Patton's election in 1975, he was one of the leaders in opposition to a convention center being located on the Lighthouse Field property along West Cliff Drive.

Patton wrote the petition which became a ballot proposition in the City of Santa Cruz, declaring that the city could have no participation in construction of a convention center at that site.

The proposition was voted on in June, 1974, and voters killed city participation on a 9,475 to 4,463 vote.

Since that time, efforts have been successful in moving the state to budget \$4.6 million for purchase of the 37-plus acre site conditioned on whether the city and county will fund operational and facility funds for a park operation at the site.

Today, the county government agreed to its portion of operational and facility funds, approving \$250,000 Coastal Bond Act funds for the project.

The contract is scheduled to go before the city today, according to Patton's recommendation on park funds to the board of supervisors.

During action today, Supervisor Marilyn Liddicoat, the sole dissenting county vote against the park project earlier, changed her vote.

She told her colleagues, "I have come to realize there is a lot of public support for a park there, and I will change my vote to 'yes'."

Patton responded, "Thank you."