

Farmers *Farmers Market* handed market

Council move keeps sale on Wednesdays

By KAREN CLARK
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SANTA CRUZ — A newly sprouted farmers' organization has been handed the downtown Farmers Market to run.

On Wednesdays.

The City Council decided Tuesday that the community wanted to buy its fresh fruits and veggies on Wednesdays — not Sundays as had been proposed by the Downtown Association, longtime sponsor of the weekday event.

But the homegrown farmers' group got strict marching orderings from the council: Figure out how to help solve the social problems surrounding the market.

It was the increase in thefts, litter, loitering and drug dealing on market day that led weary Downtown Association leaders to request a move to Sunday. They felt a Sunday morning market would have fewer conflicts because more stores would be closed

and the ruffians, drug dealers and youthful Deadheads would not be able to get up that early.

"We feel the businesses around it have really paid their dues," said Linda Steinau, executive director of the Downtown Association, which has tried for months to find a site acceptable to its members. "We've literally ended up with no place else to put it."

But council members were persuaded that many of the farms that formed the backbone of the popular market would not be able to set up shop on Sundays because they already were committed to other cities.

In addition, the dozens of telephone calls fielded by the council were from shoppers who overwhelmingly supported keeping the open-air market on Wednesday.

The event's new sponsors have renamed it the Santa Cruz Community Farmers Market. They have promised to create bylaws and a board of directors, as well as to pay \$14,000-plus to the city for an additional police officer to patrol the market.

Although the council opted to take sponsorship of the market away from the Downtown Association, members acknowledged that the social issues surrounding the market should have been dealt with by the city years ago.

"Downtown merchants were crying help an awful long time before we stepped to the plate to solve problems," said Councilwoman Katherine Beiers.

Mayor Mike Rotkin and Councilman Scott Kennedy said that the city alone can't solve the behavioral problems of the ragamuffins who have staked out portions of downtown.

"We need a stronger expression of community will about what is and what is not acceptable behavior downtown," said Kennedy. "It's a shame when a community plans around the problems created by a few people."

Among the issues to be addressed by the new farmers' organization and the city is the need for more fencing at the market, more portable bathrooms and more monitors to help educate people about unacceptable behavior before it becomes a police problem.

"I think that we should look at the complaints and concerns raised by the Downtown Association as significant," said Rotkin. "I think we have a real commitment to the business people that we do something to solve the problems."

Only Councilwoman Mary Beth Campbell supported the Downtown Association's request to move the day of market, noting that the group built the event over the past six years and deserved the city's support.

The market raises about \$44,000 a year, and the farmers' group expects to plow about \$42,000 back into it for security, rent, portable toilets, insurance, etc.

Farmer Joe Curry, who has helped organize the new group, said the long-term goal is to find a permanent site for the market that could be enclosed to provide a better atmosphere on cold or rainy days.

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Curry said recently that the social problems associated with the market actually are something downtown deals with everyday, and that the city must find a way to solve them.

After the council decision, John Lisher, vice president of the Downtown Association, said he wasn't surprised by the outcome.

"We're on the outside now, I guess," said Lisher. "It happens in an area where we have major costs of operating, and we don't have a say in it. ... We've been begging for years to have them take care of these problems and they haven't done it. The problem isn't with the farmers, it's the lack of political will by the council."

Rotkin suggested that city enforcement efforts at the market have paid off in recent weeks.

"We have not made the problems go away, and I don't think we can do that in an instant way," said Rotkin. "The biggest thing we could do is to get people to spread the word about what is acceptable behavior around the market." The new farmers' group will take over sponsorship of the market on Aug. 7. In the meantime, they will continue the process of getting non-profit status, which is required of the city.

The market will continue to be certified, which means local growers will provide pesticide-free produce.

Kennedy said he hopes the Downtown Association, or another non-profit group, elects to start a second Farmers Market on Sundays, perhaps on the Eastside.

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