

City Council moves to ban beer sales at Spring Fair

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Beer booths at the annual Spring Fair will be ousted from this year's event, if City Council members have their way.

Over objections from the Santa Cruz Jaycees, organizers of the 17-year event, council members voted 6-1 Tuesday to ask county supervisors to ban the sale of alcohol on county property next to the city-controlled San Lorenzo Park, where the fair is held each year.

The fair was started as a "How To Love The Earth" event — taking its roots in the Sixties flower-children era. But through the years it has become commercialized, and Parks and Recreation Commissioners complained last year that the fair was not being kind to the park turf, and was causing traffic congestion throughout downtown.

It is on the county property — a lawn area next to the County Government Center — that beer and food booths are set up. The area is roped off, stationed with security guards

and posted with signs, telling fairgoers to keep the alcohol inside the roped area.

Police Chief Jack Bassett had recommended the ban of the beer sales. He noted alcohol is prohibited in the park. Allowing it to be sold next to the park for the two-day fair gives a confusing message to the public, he said.

"The question has been raised, why is it illegal one day, legal the next and illegal again two days later?" Bassett told council members. "Although we know alcohol is not allowed in the park at any time, the community has no idea that the area which is vending alcohol is not city property."

The problem is not with what happens inside the roped area, but outside it — after fairgoers go on their way "with a belly full of beer," said Bassett.

Although Bassett said the problems subsided last year, he said the fair historically brings problems associated with alcohol and substance abuse — problems that spill into the downtown streets next to the park.

More than 50,000 people attended the event last year.

"There are tremendous traffic and crowd problems. Intoxicated people only add to the difficulties," said Bassett.

"Unless you can control people to control themselves," there is no way to avoid the problems, added Bassett.

But Jaycees President Carl Arnett said the council's decision could put the fair in jeopardy, because it is the beer sales that make the event turn a profit.

"Until the county decides, we're kind of lost," he said. He said the organizers will probably have a meeting to discuss the fate of the fair, set this year for May 16 and 17. He said the fact that the county shares in profits from the booze sales may influence supervisors' decision. Those profits are shared by the groups sponsoring the booths, the county and the Jaycees, he said.

One suggestion has been to move the fair to the County Fairgrounds in Watsonville.