

TOWN CLOCK

Clock to close at 1 a.m.

SM 4-2-91
1B

Vote thwarts all-night vigils

By Paul Rogers
Mercury News Staff Writer

Struggling to find a compromise solution to an emotionally explosive issue, the Santa Cruz city Parks and Recreation Commission on Monday voted to establish hours of operation at the Town Clock.

The 5-2 vote mandated closing the familiar monument between 1 a.m. and 8 a.m.

The decision, which embraced the wishes of many downtown merchants and residents, was severely criticized by homeless activists. The homeless supporters said setting hours will infringe on the constitutional rights of a small group of people at the clock who have been conducting a 24-hour vigil in the name of world peace for the last three months.

'Phony crimes'

"Are we so parochial and small-minded, so afraid, that we tolerate a police practice that creates phony crimes in order to treat human beings like so much unwanted garbage?" asked longtime homeless activist Robert Norse.

But critics argued the vigil was harming the city's image and was little more than an excuse to violate the municipal camping ban. Appearing with six downtown merchants, Patricia Calvert of the Downtown Association said the clock should have hours like any other parks facility.

"Unfortunately, the Town Clock has been used by one certain group of people when it was created for the entire public," Calvert said.

Council divided

Confronted with the controversy last Tuesday, a divided city council failed to come up with a solution to the problem and voted to send the issue back to the parks commission.