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A Large, Plush Hotel Envisioned For Santa Cruz, Aptos CofC Told

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A 10-story, 350-room Sheraton or Hilton-type hotel is envisioned for downtown Santa Cruz, the general manager of the county Convention and Visitors Bureau told the Aptos Chamber of Commerce this morning.

The hotel and convention center is the dream of Joe Flood, who took over the top tourist post last September. While maintaining he was "pushing hard" to realize his dream, Flood was the first to admit it was going to be rough going.

He pointed to the anti-tourist, anti-development political climate in the county, placing any chance of his dream in the hands of the county. The county, he explained, must first come up with the land and zoning before his promotion with the major hotel chains could follow in earnest.

Flood maintained a 350-room hotel and convention facility was "desperately needed" in order for Santa Cruz to compete for the sought-after tourist trade. "We are losing conventions daily because we can't compete," he stated.

Currently the visitor industry accounts for more than \$100 million a year in the county, he added. While the average convention size is now 150 persons, Flood would like to increase it to 500.

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Aptos Chamber directors expressed interest in Flood's project, but were quick to say Aptos and the Mid-County might be a more appropriate location for such a facility.

Ex-chamber presidents Glenn Specht and Larry Wrathall both agreed that "downtown Santa Cruz wasn't the only business community in the county."

Flood clarified that he didn't mean to say downtown Santa Cruz was the only area that would do.

"I don't care where they build a hotel in the county as long as we get one," he said.

One location, however, that Flood is not looking to is Lighthouse Field. He maintained the need of such a facility "interacting" with adjacent businesses, whether it would be in downtown Santa Cruz, Watsonville or Aptos.

Chamber President Bob McKenzie later agreed that the problem was political.

"It all revolves around land use planning," he said. "The county spends all

kinds of money on promoting the tourist and convention market, then thwarts every effort that is made in terms of land use planning."

In other business, chamber directors postponed taking a stand on the disaster relief tax that will be on the June 8 ballot in the unincorporated area.

The measure calls for a \$30 per household tax over three years (\$15 for vacant lots and \$90 for multiple home parcels and businesses), which would raise \$5 million to match \$13.8 million in federal funds for public facility storm-related repairs.

Pat Bush, assistant county administrative officer, told the chamber that if the measure fails, "the price will be high."

He explained the county was already looking at a projected \$4 to \$5 million deficit next year. "If we add another \$5 million, I don't think it would be possible," he said.

The only other alternative, Bush maintained, was possibly dipping into the county's road fund. However, that would force all road maintenance for the next three to five years to be deferred.

A chamber stand was postponed until next month so Second (Aptos) District Supervisor Robley Levy could be in attendance.