

Ripley's expresses interest in buying SV Tree Circus

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Believe it or not, the Ripley's Believe It or Not display in San Francisco has expressed an interest in buying the Scotts Valley Tree Circus, Mayor Ray Carl told members of the City Council Wednesday evening.

But the proposal preferred by council members, the City Administrator and the citizen's Tree Circus committee is for a restaurant to be built on the site, Carl noted.

Carl gave a report to the council after meeting with Robert Hogan, a contractor who owns the property on Scotts Valley Drive which contains the Tree Circus.

The Tree Circus is a collection of 50 to 60 unusually-shaped, grafted living trees created by the late Axel Erlandson. He started the project in 1946 in hopes of turning it into a tourist attraction, then sold it in the '60s when it was made a part of the "Lost World" display in Scotts Valley.

Hogan bought the property in 1977 with the idea of turning it into a commercial development at some point. Since that time the city, Hogan and and people interested in the Tree Circus have been struggling to find a way to preserve both the trees and Hogan financial interests.

After meeting with Hogan last week

Carl said Hogan has been considering several proposals for the Tree Circus.

Ripley's Believe It Or Not wants to cut down the trees, preserve them chemically and put them on display in San Francisco.

The owner of the Nob Hill Foods grocery store chain has expressed a desire to transport the 19 trees which can be replanted to his property in Morgan Hill.

Another idea would be "to cut down all the trees and put in a commercial venture, which he did not want to do because he knows a lot of people are interested in the Tree Circus," said Carl.

Finally, Carl said, businessman Larry Kinder, who works as the vice president of the Scotts Valley electronics firm of Azuray, is thinking of leasing the land to put in a restaurant.

"Hogan doesn't have too much faith in the restaurant business because it has a high rate of failure but he would sell the property to anyone who wants to start a restuarant,"

Carl also said Hogan was opposed to any attempts to put the trees in a special zone or to pass an ordinance forbidding him from removing the trees because it would devalue his property.

Hogan himself was unavailable for comment.