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A Downtown Path To An 'Old Town'

Cooper Street in downtown Santa Cruz began to look more like the path to an "old town" project this week with the sale of the old courthouse there.

County supervisors approved the sale of the 1894 building Tuesday to Max W. Walden for a total cost of about \$81,000.

Wednesday night county parks and recreation commissioners pledged to restore the 1882 Hall of Records next door, even if it means using volunteers.

And there is talk of "eventually" moving the sheriff's office from the Front Street-Cooper Street area into the new law enforcement complex.

"Well, we finally did it. We sold the courthouse," grinned Supervisor Dan Forbus.

The sale of the abandoned courthouse to Walden means the structure may be renovated and turned into a series of speciality shops in the style of an earlier era. Walden is the developer of Los Gatos' Old Town, which was created from a former school.

It also frees \$20,000 in funds the county had been saving to demolish the building. That money goes into the restoration project for the Hall of Records octagon building next door. The building will become a museum.

A highly-favored project backed by the local historical society and the county parks and recreation commission, the Hall of Records got a severe financial blow when restoration bids came in at better than \$90,000. There is only about \$75,000 available, including a state grant for the project.

But the project will proceed, even if it means cutting down on some of the careful detail

restoration hoped for, Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Hughes told the county commission Wednesday night.

"We can cut out some sections of the project, such as doing the back rooms in the annex behind the building," Hughes said.

Greatest single expense in the bidding, according to Hughes, was the charge for cleaning off decades of accumulated paint from the old brick, and of course, the removal of a wing on the east side which destroys the original eight-sided shape.

The only way the brick can be brought back is to do it by hand, and this is very expensive," Hughes said. "We tested sandblasting but the brick and mortar are just too soft. It tears it right up."

A group of welfare recipients has asked to be given jobs such as helping to restore the Hall of Records. Hughes said it is possible that volunteers such as those might be useful for some jobs, "but I wouldn't want to do that with the structural work. I don't think we can let them start tearing bricks down."

Architect Francis Palms of Monterey, who has made the restoration project a "labor of love," Hughes says, agrees with the plan to trim back some restoration efforts. The project, hopefully, will be rebid sometime after March 2.

Parks commissioners quickly gave Hughes a vote of confidence and a go-ahead to get county supervisors' permission. "We have to let supervisors know we don't want this project delayed or dropped," Chairman James Hammond commented.