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Public Hearings To Come

Anti-Demolition Plan On Mall Delayed

By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

A law to forbid demolition of buildings along the Pacific Avenue Garden Mall for at least a year was initiated by the Santa Cruz City Council Tuesday night after a bitter debate stopped it from becoming effective immediately.

For the council majority - Mayor Joseph Ghio, Charlotte Melville, Bert Muhly and Carole DePalma - the vote was a loss because earlier, these council members had tried to pass the same ordinance on an emergency basis that would have bypassed a public hearing on what was conceded to be a controversial measure.

An emergency ordinance requires five votes for passage, and that was denied by Vice Mayor Larry Edler, John Mahaney and Jim Hammond.

Now the ordinance will be published as proposed and the council will be required to hold a public hearing on it. As a regular ordinance it can be passed by a simple majority and would become effective 30 days after that passage. An emergency law is effective at once.

Mahaney got the debate going by asking at the outset why the proposed emergency ordinance was on the agenda. He said in part: "I get the feeling the public is not aware of this, that

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this ordinance is directed, perhaps, to one building. I think that is wrong. We should not blanket any one area with an ordinance like this."

Councilwoman Charlotte Melville, who raised the issue at the council's Nov. 8 meeting with specific reference to proposed razing of the Bank of America building, retorted that if the council can be asked to protect the mall against certain kinds of people it could also act to protect the mall in a physical sense.

Melville noted that the controversy a few years ago on the demolition of the old McHugh-Bianchi building had kept the city in a turmoil for months, and she said: "I don't think that kind of controversy helps our city."

Councilman Bert Muhly backed Melville's stance vigorously, contending that "the mall is a special place" and

asserting, "We are losing the mall physically.. Every time we let the best artist in the world paint the facade of a building we let a bit of the mall go."

Muhly said the council has approved getting an urban design plan done for the mall and that a hold should be put on mall demolitions until that plan has been done.

Edler said that if the painting bothers Muhly then the city should put a moratorium on painting buildings.

Hammond said that clamping a moratorium on the mall "is going farther than we need to go" and he said all the council has to do is insist that demolition permit requests be reviewed by the council.

Mahaney sought to get that procedure ordered by the council, noting there are only 30 or so such requests a year, but he got nowhere.

Melville seemed at one point to be trying to get out from under Mahaney's accusation the whole ordinance is aimed at the Bank of America building. She said this was not the case and added, "I was probably built 10 years before that."

Edler retorted: "That's no argument for preservation."

Even Melville laughed.

Ghio was the swing vote, breaking deadlocks on both the emergency ordinance and the one finally introduced for later consideration.