

Amid Protests, City Passes Streets Plan

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The Livable Streets Plan and its controversial one-way barricade on California Street survived a strong assault by a large segment of the Santa Cruz community Tuesday night.

Despite vocal protests by an overflow crowd, the City Council voted 4-3 to make the barrier permanent and an take away the no-left-turn sign and stop sign on Taylor Street.

Defending the barricade and the Livable Streets Plan "in concept" was the council's progressive-socialist majority — John Laird, Mardi Wormhoudt, Bruce Van Allen and Mayor Michael Rotkin who collected more catcalls than applause from the audience which numbered more than 100 persons.

The majority also held off a popular motion by Councilman Joe Ghio to put the diverter and/or the entire Livable Streets Plan up for election on the November ballot.

When the motion failed, Ghio warned the council that city residents may get the proposal placed on the ballot through initiative petitions.

The council's action will not go into effect until after the city attorney decides if

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a state Supreme Court decision on Berkeley's street barriers applies to the Livable Streets Plan.

In that decision, the high court said the streets belong to all the people and the local government does not have broad powers to choke off traffic.

City Attorney Neal Anderson said his office should be ready with an opinion in the near future.

Rotkin summarized his position on the barricade at California and Laurel, saying it was "a real, but small, inconvenience to many people versus a living environment for a smaller number of people."

He told the skeptical crowd, "You object to the inconvenience, but it is a small inconvenience if you'll admit it."

The answer he got back from the crowd was "they're not listening to us. It doesn't matter what we say, they're going to keep the diverter anyway."

According to testimony and petitions, it appears about 80 percent of the town doesn't like the major changes proposed by the plan. About 20 percent want the traffic control and trees.

It appears also that the 20 percent comes from within the plan area — neighbors who worked on the plan in the first place.

Mellis advised Rotkin, "You really should be talking of the convenience of a few neighbors" and Ghio chimed in, "You have inconvenienced a lot of people for a very vocal and well-organized group of people."

He said the "well-organized group" was made up of the people who brought the progressive-socialist majority to power "and they are being paid off."

Ghio further accused the majority of polarizing the community through its implementation of the Livable Streets Plan.

Van Allen told Ghio, "You were fighting this years ago and I have to wonder who really is the polarizer." He accused Ghio of "playing the crowd."

Sherrill Kinsley, who lives along California Street, said the diverter was protecting students. The only ones who are diverted are the "cruisers, tourists" and other drivers who don't live in the neighborhood.

A number of people in the audience responded, "That's not true."

Kinsley was unswayed, saying the diverter "stops California from becoming a U.S. Highway 1."

Jeff Oberdorfer, the architect of the plan, said the city has become inundated with traffic in recent years and that it needed a way to make it clear to all drivers the type of roadway they were using. He said it had to be made clear which streets were arterials and which were residential streets.

Oberdorfer said Sunset Magazine has described Santa Cruz as "great place to visit if you can stand the traffic."

On the other side of the Livable Streets Plan, a faculty member and Santa Cruz High School Principal Jane Martin said more than 80 percent of the school — teachers, students and others — opposed the decision to make California Street one-way.

One point of agreement was that Lincoln Street should remain a one-way road, but that the "S" curve should be removed and replaced by as many as three "chokers" (street narrowing berms) which would slow traffic, but open parking spaces.

Wormhoudt said she supported the plan as a way to stop the automobile from dominating neighborhoods, and Laird agreed neighborhoods should have more protection from traffic domination.

However, the council minority and most of the audience, held that one can't ask a majority to suffer inconvenience and the effects of more traffic which is diverted to their streets for the benefit of a minority within the downtown neighborhood.