

Customers support council on market decision

By KAREN CLARK

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SANTA CRUZ — Patrons of the downtown Farmers Market on Wednesday overwhelmingly supported the City Council's decision to leave the popular open-air market at its midweek slot on Lincoln Street.

"No matter where they put this market here in town, they aren't going to get rid of that problem," said Santa Cruz resident Jean Wolf, pointing to a group of transients at Pacific Avenue and Cathcart Street. "This market and that problem have nothing to do with each other."

The council on Tuesday rejected a request from the Downtown Association, longtime sponsors of the



Steinau

event, to move the market to Sunday.

Merchants thought a Sunday morning market in the same location would present fewer problems because most stores wouldn't be open, parking would be more plentiful and the transients causing problems in the area wouldn't be up that early.

But a newly formed organization made up of the farmers successfully lobbied the council to let them take control of the Wednesday afternoon market.

"It's a good idea to just let them be on their own," said Maxine Job, a Santa Cruz resident and longtime patron of the downtown market. "They've been hassling them so much over the years. But they brought business to the downtown after the earthquake, and it's only once a week."

The council's decision was a double-edged sword for the Downtown Association, which not only lost control of a weekly event operating in its own backyard,

but also lost the \$24,000 in profit the group expected to earn this year from the market.

"We have reserves, and we can operate (without making cuts) for awhile," said Linda Steinau, executive director of the Downtown Association.

Even if the council had supported the association's request to move the market to Sundays, it's likely the group would have had to dip into that profit margin to pay more than \$13,000 for a city police officer to patrol the market.

"It was turning out to be not as large a profit in the future," said Steinau.

One reason Steinau is optimistic that losing the profitable Farmers Market won't be catastrophic to the association's \$250,000-plus annual budget is the advent of the Art, Wine and Jazz Festival.

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The downtown festival, sponsored for the first time this year by the association, proved to be so popular that it produced a \$12,000 profit. The association plans to expand the festival next May to include all of Pacific Avenue from Water to Laurel streets.

But the success of the festival doesn't wash the bad taste of losing control of the market out of the mouths of association leaders. They are particularly upset by the council's promise to help ease social problems associated with the Wednesday market, help the association had sought for years.

"It's a big issue," said Steinau. "I don't know how one group can address it ... except for the fact the council seems to be much more willing than in the past to help. I can't say there's no resentment on my part that it came too late to save our sponsorship of the market."

Merchants have complained that the theft, vandal-

ism, aggressive panhandling and drug-dealing problems associated with some of the transients and Deadheads on a daily basis downtown are exacerbated on Wednesdays.

But Santa Cruz resident Terry Rusboldt said he believes what the market brings to Santa Cruz outweighs the social problems.

"I'm absolutely very happy that it's here on Wednesdays," said Rusboldt. "I mean, if it has this many people coming here on a regular basis ... certainly they should be able to fix the small problems."

The city and the farmers' group have promised to work together to provide more temporary fencing, trash receptacles, portable toilets and security to ensure that merchants and shoppers don't suffer because of the market.

Because of construction on Lincoln Street, the entire market will be in the parking lots between Lincoln and Cathcart Street.