

# Santa Cruz merchants want tents open for holiday season

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Santa Cruz merchants displaced by the earthquake want to be in tents by Thanksgiving to sell their holiday wares.

Merchants and downtown advocates pressed the City Council this week to order the tents as soon as possible so the Pacific Garden Mall businesses aren't forced to move elsewhere, such as to the Capitola Mall.

"It's important that you make a clear statement to merchants, so they can decide to stay downtown, because they have to decide something," said William Rubel, chairman of the Downtown Commission.

Margaret Wilson, owner of the popular variety store Lily Wong's, said most downtown merchants don't believe the tent city will materialize. She said she's committed to downtown, so she hasn't gone elsewhere, but she's got \$1 million worth of inventory just sitting in her closed store.

"I know that if I'm not open the day after Thanksgiving, I'm bankrupt," Wilson said. "One week, two weeks later won't make any difference."

Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt pledged the council's "strong conceptual approval" of the plan to house merchants in tents, but said the city must know how it will fund and staff the project before the tents can be ordered.

"My guess is, it's going to be a cliffhanger every single day until it opens," she said of the tent city, "but we can do it and it will open and we will have a Christmas downtown."

Contrary to previous reports, Rubel said, the Federal Emergency Management Agency would not pay for the tents.

Wormhoudt said, however, that she believed she had a commitment for funding from a state Department of Commerce small-business official. She said a \$50,000 price tag had been discussed and Santa Cruz may also be able to get a portion of that agency's \$150,000 budget for promotions.

The tents, which consist of cloth stretched tightly over aluminum frameworks, would be supplied by a company called Sprung Instant Structures, which has supplied tents for conferences and other earthquake-ravaged communities, for 40 cents a square foot per month. They can withstand winds of up to 140 mph and can be air-conditioned, lighted, carpeted and heated.

Proposed sites for the tents, which would take at least several

days to erect, include the parking lots behind Bookshop Santa Cruz and Ford's Department Store.

Downtown Association representatives were to meet with merchants at the Loudon Nelson Center yesterday to get commitments for tent space. The council agreed to meet today at 4 p.m. to discuss the matter again, as well as long-term reconstruction of the Pacific Garden Mall.

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tion of the Pacific Garden Mall.

Other space might be available for merchants in the Bank of America building and the old County Jail on Front Street.

Meanwhile, a partnership of people from both the public and private sectors has been proposed to help Santa Cruz start the long-range rebuilding of its downtown.

The Downtown Commission is recommending that members of key groups in the redevelopment process meet for a daylong retreat to define a vision of the downtown and to lay the ground rules for the redevelopment process. The retreat would be organized by the Downtown Association and Chamber of Commerce, which are busy trying to help damaged businesses relocate, and the Downtown Commission in consultation with the International Downtown Association.

"The redevelopment process should begin by focusing on rebuilding the earthquake-damaged

areas," the report states, "but should also focus long-term on better integrating the downtown business district with its surroundings."

The boundaries for the proposed planning area would stretch from Highway 1 to the beach and from Chestnut Street to Ocean Street, the report said. Under the redevelopment pro-

posal, professionals experienced in modern planning processes would act as consultants and would work toward gaining community consensus, rather than conducting workshops among community members, as has been done in the past. A public/private organization would be formed to direct the redevelopment process.

"Such an organization must recognize existing organizations, institutions and coalitions," the report says.

The commission expects to have a more complete version of its proposal, including a budget, source of funds and retreat location, drawn up soon.

The City Council was expected to discuss this proposal today, unless discussion of short-term solutions takes precedence. Council members were expecting more information about short-term relocation of downtown businesses into tents in time for the holiday shopping season.

## REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
November 2, 1989