

Tree plan debate won't go away

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SANTA CRUZ — Like a horror movie ghoul, there are some controversies in the proposal to landscape Pacific Avenue that simply refuse to die:

Palm trees and spacing.

In their discussion Monday night what to send to the City Council for approval, members of Vision Santa Cruz renewed objections to plans for a short row of palms, and to the 25-foot spacing of trees along the avenue.

A similar debate had been conducted by the Streetscape Committee before the plan came to Vision members.

In the end, however, both the palm trees and spacing stayed — with stipulations.

Downtown merchant A.C. Smith started the ball rolling with the comment that although the property owners might have backed the 25-foot rather than 50-foot spacing, most merchants do not.

He successfully backed a motion to stipulate to the council that a fully developed plan for maintaining the landscaping, with specific funding mechanisms, must be ap-

proved at the same time the streetscape plan is OK'd.

Attached to the motion was the idea that Vision members particularly were interested in the need for the trees to be pruned so that solid shade wouldn't be a problem even as the trees grow to maturity.

Members were concerned that not only would parts of the sidewalk be in full shade if the trees weren't pruned properly, but also that the storefronts would be blocked from the view.

"If we don't have a plan ... all the horrors A.C. talked about will indeed come true," acknowledged Jim Lang, director of Parks and Recreation.

He assured Vision members that his department will have a complete maintenance manual, and that how many people it will require to complete the regular work would be factored in before the landscape plan is approved.

Merchant Richard Bayer said he might not accept the 25-foot spacing without assurances they would be properly pruned.

Architect Mark Primack said the group simply should put conditions on the city as the developers of the street. "I don't think the city

should shy away from them."

Vision member Bruce Van Allen, however, called the debate "way overblown," saying he was "tired of the degree of exaggeration" in the discussion.

He said the trees wouldn't cause full shade for many years, and that this could be properly controlled with maintenance.

Members agreed to send their stipulation to the council, recognizing that no council could guarantee funding forever because new members wouldn't be bound by this original decision.

On the palm front, a vote taken after a spirited discussion showed the majority of Vision members could live with the controversial design element.

The row of palms will line Pacific Avenue in front of the movie theater/retail shop building proposed for the old Gottschalks site.

"From the very first time this came up, I've been baffled by the amount of passion these palm trees bring up," said Smith. "I think they make a specific statement and go with the architecture there."

But former Mayor Mike Rotkin was adamant in his objection, which he based on the public testi-

mony taken in earlier hearings.

"It's the one thing people are going to flip out about," said Rotkin, adding that people don't want to "turn our mall into John Wayne Airport, which is a disgusting looking place."

But Primack supported the designers' plan.

"One of the nice things about this design is it transcends personal bias," said Primack. "You can't substantiate a negative view of palm trees except as a personal bias."

He said the trees were appropriate where they are placed in the plan and "at this point we should have some faith in our designers."

At press time, it appeared Vision members were ready to endorse the overall plan with a few amendments, such as those on the maintenance plan.

The City Council will conduct a public hearing on the proposal for Pacific Avenue on Tuesday, June 11.

Once accepted, the streetscape work is expected to begin next year after the replacement of the old pipes under Pacific Avenue have been tackled.