

V TOWN CLOCK 3-27-91 SJM IB

Council puts Town Clock debate in limbo

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Mired in debate over the boundaries between free speech and vagrancy, the Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday failed to reach a decision about how to confront a group of peace protesters who have been sleeping underneath the city's Town Clock for nearly three months.

By a 4-2 vote, the council directed its Parks and Recreation Commission to come up with a solution by April 23.

Although the vigil has become the flash point in an increasingly volatile confronta-

tion between hundreds of angry city residents who want the protesters removed and municipal leaders, the vote ensured that little will change at the clock for at least a month.

During the Persian Gulf war earlier this year, the clock served as a common rallying point for demonstrations. But since the fighting stopped three weeks ago, a determined group of about half a dozen people has remained. The protesters, some of whom are homeless and from out of town, have drawn a flood of complaints to City Hall and numerous camping and littering citations from police.

On Tuesday, a majority of council members said they could not support a proposal introduced by Councilman John Mahaney to build a waist-high, wrought-iron fence around the familiar monument.

Mahaney, who was mayor in 1976 when the clock was moved to the head of Pacific Avenue, said the people piling signs and garbage at the clock were insulting the residents who paid \$50 for memorial bricks to finance the project.

"We've reached a point where I think it's really a tragedy," Mahaney said. "It's a desecration not only to those individuals who bought bricks but also to the city of

Santa Cruz."

But the council's liberal majority, and several homeless advocates at the meeting, argued that erecting a fence wouldn't work. Other proposals, including setting daytime operation hours for the clock and building flower beds around it, also went nowhere.

"It's wishful thinking that we can somehow legislate people out of view who we find visually unappealing," said Councilman Scott Kennedy.

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers agreed with audience members who said the city shouldn't inhibit assembly at a monument

dedicated to freedom during the nation's bicentennial festivities.

"Monuments are there to be loved and hugged and trampled on," she said.

Conservative Councilman Louis Rittenhouse wasn't buying it. He cautioned that as long as the vigil continues, the city will lose credibility with the business leaders it desperately needs to reinvest in the ravaged downtown.

"If we can't correct this problem at the Town Clock now, how are they supposed to believe us when we say we're going to correct (similar) problems on Pacific Avenue?" Rittenhouse asked.