

Downtown Vets Hall unlikely to open this year

Veterans
Money to make seismic repairs not available

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SANTA CRUZ — The county's newest report on the Veterans Memorial Building, which has been closed since January because of structural problems, suggests reopening the popular community hall will come later than many thought — perhaps years from now.

Local efforts to win state and federal funding to pay for the estimated \$1.5 million in repairs have so far come up short, and the issue isn't expected to be taken up again by the Board of Supervisors until as late as November.

That means work on the building wouldn't start until at least next year, and completion of the repairs could be years off.

5-26-10
"Unless something that has not been previously identified is done, the county does not have the funds available (this year)," said Nancy Gordon, director of the county's General Services Department. "Does that mean we're not trying? No."

The structural deficiencies at the Vets Hall, which came to light when an engineering study found the building could

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ROBINSON KUNTZ/SENTINEL FILE

The Santa Cruz County Veterans Memorial Building was closed in January because of structural problems.

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topple in an earthquake, only exacerbate the county's financial woes. The county, which owns the nearly 80-year-old landmark on Front Street, currently faces a \$17 million budget shortfall.

County leaders say they're actively pursuing state and federal grants to repair the building.

For veteran Patricia Hendrix of Watsonville, the county's lack of money and its delay in making fixes have been discouraging.

"I'm worried that they're going to keep putting this off," she said Tuesday.

Hendrix, who served as a medic during the Vietnam

War, started Women's Veterans of the Monterey Bay Area on the day the building was ordered shut. Since then, the young group has been meeting at one of its member's homes, where Hendrix says space has been tight, communication has been tough and expanding membership has been nearly impossible.

Supervisor Neal Coonerty said the process of getting the building repaired is not unlike the fixes made to downtown after the Loma Prieta earthquake.

"It's slow-going at the beginning and people wonder why the building won't go up more quickly," he said. "At some point, though, you find a way to finance the building and the building can go up real quick."