

TREES ✓ SC Council heeds pleas to save tree

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SANTA CRUZ — Tree lovers breathed a sigh of relief Tuesday when the City Council decided to look for ways to save the California pepper tree on Cedar and Lincoln streets.

But several factors will have to fall into place if the landmark tree is to live past September.

Councilman Scott Kennedy asked that the diseased tree not be cut down in the next month so a subcommittee of the council would have time to strike "a viable alternative."

Any recommendation to save the tree, he emphasized, must have the support of the Calvary Episcopal Church, which owns the tree.

Church officials are worried they would be liable if someone is hurt by a branch falling from the dying tree.

Kennedy suggested that the city attorney look into ways that the city could assume all liability.

He said the city also could consider using staff to help bring the tree back from the brink of death, as well as fencing it to protect it from climbers.

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The fencing would be temporary while the tree was nursed back to health, but a church representative was concerned the congregation wouldn't like a fence on the lawn.

Councilman Don Lane also suggested that a tree would hide the very thing the council wanted to save — the tree.

The subcommittee proposed by Kennedy will discuss these issues during August, and will return to the council on Sept. 24 with a compromise both sides support.

Members of the Sierra Club were adamant in their presentation to the council that the tree could be saved with tender loving care.

They said their study revealed the tree could be 100 years old, or older.

"It's a reminder of our past, and frankly so little of our past remains in Santa Cruz," said member Terry Terhaar.

Mike DiDonato, a member of the city commission that recom-

mended the tree be removed, said he dissented on that vote.

He was the one who suggested the city assume liability for the tree, and show residents "a good-faith effort."

Deborah Malkin, who represents the local Sierra Club chapter, said a certified arborist she sought out had told her the tree could be saved.

"We need to be very, very careful before we do away with this tree," she said in a written statement.

"Once it is cut down, it can never be replaced. Any tree that is planted in that location, even another pepper tree, will not achieve the status of the current tree during any of our lifetimes, or even the lifetimes of our children."

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers supported Kennedy's idea to look into a compromise.

"I think we're buying time," she said. "What is a little more time after a hundred years? It's that special to me."