

# City Will Study Conference Center Concept

A Santa Cruz City Council majority Thursday agreed informally it would support the concept of studying the feasibility of building a conference-cultural center but balked at isolating money in the municipal budget for future construction.

The informal comments came during the council's last scheduled study session on the proposed \$21.3-million 1977-78 municipal budget.

The isolation of some \$352,000 already in the capital improvements budget and the allocation of 25 per cent of the room taxes collected over the next two years to this account were

asked by Mark Lewis, president of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, and Barbara Klein, manager of the County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Lewis said the two groups have found a strong interest in building a center that could provide both facilities for small conventions and a desirable environment for the burgeoning performing arts movement here.

Councilman Bert Muhly said he thinks a lot of support for such a facility would come from backers of the Lighthouse Field park if the location were such that the entire city, rather

than an isolated complex, were used to cater to attendees of the conferences and performances.

He suggested that the original Lighthouse Point convention center proposed a few years ago would have in effect set up an enclave at which attendees would more or less have been isolated from the rest of the city.

However, Muhly said his own inclination on the money matter would be not to squirrel the money away at this time for a center of the future. He said:

"The council needs to be flexible in its budget. I would be willing to go strongly in support of the study, but to put the

money away for that specific construction purpose might be too much of a straightjacket for us fiscally."

Mayor Joseph Ghio said he could support the concept that city money might be used for a center at some time in the future if a study indicated it were desirable, but he said that he, like Muhly, would prefer not to earmark money for that at this time.

Councilwoman Carole DePalma suggested that in any construction of the future the city might want to go to a bond issue or seek a grant. She said she felt the council does not need to save now for a center,

but added:

"I am willing to study the concept of a center, but I think the county should be involved, too. This would be a community thing, a regional thing like the county is working on with the city now at the Laurel Community Center and the Lighthouse Field purchase.

Under questioning from the press, Ghio and Muhly both agreed that any statements on a center made by this council would not be binding on future councils.

The query was related to past hassles over the Lighthouse Point Convention Center. This project got off winging with

strong from the county board of supervisors and the city council of that day.

But subsequent supervisorial and council elections eroded that support and in the end opponents led a successful initiative election that terminated the project.

Lewis said a committee has been formed to get the center study made. Committee members listed in material given by him to the council include Sam Leask III, Charlotte Melville of the city council, Reese Davis, Supervisors' Chairman Ed Borovatz, Joe Hall of the city planning department, Neil Sandow and Ken Ferguson.

But this group simply discussed a possible study, Lewis said. And he urged all council members and all other interested persons to get involved to help determine if such a center would be worth building.

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