

Performance hall carries high price

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SANTA CRUZ — A mayor's task force that looked at the Del Mar Theater for six months concludes it would make a dandy performing arts center. The only problem is the approximate \$5 million price tag.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt convened the 18-member task force in February to look for a suitable downtown site for a performing arts center. The committee quickly focused on the Pacific Avenue movie theater, once a prime example of the large Art Deco style movie houses of the 1930s. The Del Mar, owned by United Artists, has since been divided into four parts with separate screens.

The theater is structurally sound and the dividing walls could be removed in an effort to restore it to its former grandeur, said architect Hugh Carter, a task force member.

Tuesday, the City Council agreed with

the task force that its work should be referred to the Cultural Council which is about to conduct a similar countywide study.

"I'm convinced the Del Mar would be a wonderful facility," Wormhoudt said. "It's uniquely well-suited." Wormhoudt said the "only barrier I can see is the price tag."

The task force estimated the property is worth \$1.5 million. A vice president of United Artists' Realty Division indicated the company would be interested in selling the theater if it could develop a modern, multi-screen theater at another city location.

Another \$3 million would be needed to rehabilitate the interior.

The city doesn't have that kind of money. Wormhoudt guessed that persons with money who are inclined to donate to the arts would not be inclined to donate money to the city. "They

already pay taxes," she said.

She suggested that an independent group would be more successful in attracting donations.

While the mayor's task force was looking at the Del Mar, the Cultural Council was getting ready to conduct a study of the county's needs for a performing arts facility at the behest of the county Arts Commission.

Currently, the only facilities to host a large scale event are at UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College. The Cabrillo Music Festival erects a tent at UCSC to accommodate its audiences.

Other, smaller venues are available but nothing in the 1,000-seat range.

The Del Mar was originally built to hold 1,500 patrons. It could be remodeled to hold between 800 and 1,000 people, the task force estimated.

The theater's location in downtown Santa Cruz could be both an advantage

and a hindrance to its use as a county performing arts complex. The task force noted its prominence in the economic center of town. "The idea of a performing arts center is not just a center for the performing arts, but a center for the cultural activities of the community," Carter said.

But the Cultural Council will be looking at a center to serve the needs of the entire county, its representatives said. "We're concerned that the whole county be represented," said Lance Linares, executive director of the Cultural Council.

The council's president, Phil Rather, owner of Watsonville radio station KOMY, said that once the study gets under way — it is awaiting a contract from the county Arts Commission — the task force's report will be taken seriously. "We'll look at all options," he said. "The committee will keep an open mind."