

✓ Mayor tries to persuade Gottschalks to reopen

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The city is continuing its efforts to encourage Gottschalks to relocate its department store downtown, Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said Monday.

Wormhoudt told fellow City Council members at a study session on rebuilding plans that she, businessman Larry Pearson and banker Harvey Nicholson went to the company's headquarters in Fresno on Friday to ask Got-

tschalks' officials to even consider a temporary store.

Most of the Gottschalks store at Pacific and Church streets was destroyed in the earthquake. Only an addition which housed the men's department still stands.

Wormhoudt said she encouraged Gottschalks Chairman Joseph Levy and President Gerald Blum to relocate in that still-standing department until they can rebuild completely.

She said that adjacent buildings would have to be repaired before even that portion of the Gottschalks store could reopen.

Wormhoudt said that even though it was a "good meeting," Levy and Blum gave no firm commitment.

Gottschalks currently is completing work on a new store at the Capitola Mall. That store is expected to open later this spring.

Wormhoudt said she believes a

case can be made for Gottschalks to have stores both in downtown Santa Cruz and in Capitola. She pointed to sales figures quoted by economic consultants that purportedly showed the downtown store was healthy before the quake.

Two different groups of consultants who have prepared reports on the economic viability of the Pacific Garden Mall have said that persuading Gottschalks and Ford's, the other major department store downtown, to return to the mall will be crucial to rebuilding efforts.

Ford's has not announced any plans. The company suffered heavy losses in Santa Cruz, Watsonville and Hollister in the earthquake.

Wormhoudt told councilmembers that the Gottschalks officials expressed concerns about security, safety and parking problems downtown.

"I told them that our goals are quite compatible," Wormhoudt said.

Other council members agreed that most problems on the mall stemmed from alcohol and drug abuse and mental illness and must be addressed if a rebuilt downtown is to be successful.

"It's not a problem of homelessness," said Councilman John Laird.

Programs to deal with the problems are expensive, he said. "When we (the council) endorsed the nickle-a-drink tax (on the November ballot) we said we hope one of the top priorities would be to establish a treatment center," Laird said.

"If programs don't respond, these problems become police problems," Laird said.

Wormhoudt noted that the council recently opened a day center for people with mental health problems. She said similar efforts could help relocate people from the library and downtown to those centers.

Councilman John Mahaney said the council should publicly urge people not to give handouts to the panhandlers.

"Just the other day two people approached me. I told them about the shelter programs. They said they knew where they were but they weren't interested in them," Mahaney said.

In a matter related to the Gottschalks' rebuilding, Mike Schmidt of Bank of America said Vision Santa Cruz is in the process of surveying other building owners and tenants to gauge their intentions.

Some are moving ahead with rebuilding plans, but others, including some absentee owners, are uncertain. He said a full report will be made soon to Vision Santa Cruz.

In other discussions Monday, council members said it will be important for the economic and design elements of the Vision Santa Cruz plan to be merged before that

plan comes before the council on April 24.

Joe Ghio complained that discussions by the design task force have largely been "unrealistic" and "chaotic."

He also said he believes that many members' expectations won't be realized because they have not been balanced against economic realities.

"The (design and economic) plans must be integrated in order for the council to deal with them," Wormhoudt said.

Vision Santa Cruz will have at least two more meetings before those plans are presented to the City Council.

Wormhoudt said the council will look at proposals from both Vision Santa Cruz and from the Urban Land Institute.

She said she remains confident that the council will find more agreement than disagreement in the two sets of recommendations.