

✓ Council moves to revitalize Mall

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council put itself on record Tuesday that it is committed to strengthening Santa Cruz's downtown economy.

The council voted unanimously to support six recommendations by Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt that will, among other things, set up a task force to coordinate downtown revitalization efforts.

Wormhoudt, noting that the Mall is approaching its 20th anniversary, said it was the "appropriate time ... to take stock of downtown."

Downtown Santa Cruz, especially the Pacific Garden Mall, has suffered under increased competition from suburban and out-of-county shopping malls, as well as from its image of being a haven for street people and the homeless.

The council agreed to adopt the following policy statement: "The City Council is ... committed to policies that will, first and foremost, serve to strengthen the economy of the Downtown."

The council also approved Wormhoudt's motion to appoint a two-year task force of members from the Downtown Association of businesses, the city Downtown Commission and the council to oversee "short

and long term efforts to enhance the Downtown Area."

The task force will be composed of Teresa Gellis, Tom Brezsny and Louie Rittenhouse of the Downtown Association; William Rubel, Neal Coonerty and Ron Prilliman of the Downtown Commission; and Wormhoudt, Joe Ghio and a third member, to be announced, from the council.

Finally, the council directed City Manager Richard Wilson to appoint a paid "special projects coordinator" to oversee city staff support for the task force. Assistant City Manager Laura Brown will get \$100 a month in extra compensation to do this job. Wormhoudt, in a memo to the council, said that the city parks and recreation, planning, public works and police departments will all be involved in the downtown effort.

Wormhoudt went on to state that "increased cooperation between the business community and city government is called for to maintain the downtown's standing as the regional commercial and retail center. Success will require a major effort by both parties, and it is most important for the city to demonstrate its commitment at the outset."

The council, especially its progressive majority, was

criticized as being "anti-business" by conservative candidates in the recently concluded election.

One of those candidates, newly elected Councilman John Mahaney, Tuesday called the new policies and the task force a "tremendous idea," although he said he hoped similar efforts will be directed toward the west and east side business areas.

Wormhoudt said the task force will not be a "symbolic or figurative committee." She noted that the actions taken Tuesday follow a series of meetings and seminars attended by city officials and the downtown business community concerning revitalizing the downtown mall and surrounding area.

In addition, former Mayor John Laird, still a council member, announced Tuesday that he plans to continue convening the ad hoc "social issues" group that has been meeting to develop a strategy to deal with street people, homeless people, the mentally ill and drug and alcohol abusers who have seemingly settled in downtown.

Rick Kuhn, executive director of the Downtown Association, praised the council's actions, saying it was "gratifying the council is taking that focus. We look forward to the beginning of some constructive, cooperative efforts."

Mall
11-23-88