

To Provide A 'Voice' ...

New Soquel Business Group

BY DON RIGHETTI
Sentinel Staff Writer

Downtown Soquel merchants took a big step toward revitalization of their spokesman organization Friday at a noon meeting.

Feeling the village sector is without a voice in the absence of a functioning commercial association, a group of village merchants outlined in a rapid-fire meeting why they think an association is needed and then went ahead with the first steps to building one.

"This time we're going to get things done, I promise you," Bob Meyer, president of the new group vowed to the assembled merchants.

Meyer said the move to form a new group has come at this time because there are so many immediate problems pressing upon the community there could be no further delay in giving a voice to downtown.

First order of business of the new group: Make sure the needs and desires of the village commercial community are included in the revised master plan for the Soquel area.

The merchants are under the gun, because the plan is slated to be turned over to county government shortly. But the group thinks it can have a statement of needs and goals ready for inclusion in the plan by Friday.

The old downtown association fell on evil times about a year and a half ago.

Nobody was coming to the meetings, so President Jim Coulter called a special meeting to determine what was to happen to the organization.

Several younger merchants showed up to accuse the old guard of concentrating too much on civic affairs and not enough on merchandising. The younger group also said the agency needed some new blood.

The old officers resigned en masse and the new group, under the leadership of Frank Gill, took their places.

But the new organization was unstructured in its affairs and has been inactive for about the past year.

Formation of a new group is important, Jim Luker of the Soquel Valleys Assn. told the merchants Friday, in order to give downtown a vehicle for its point of view.

He noted Soquel Supervisor Dan Forbus has reported downtown is without a voice. Luker said Forbus told him, "There is no one to tell me what the downtown community wants."

Luker added, "There has been no group which could say, 'This is what is economically important to Soquel.'"

He thought the new association should act as an ex-officio town council and as a

liaison between businessmen.

The new organization should not attempt to fulfill the functions of a service club, that its membership should be limited to business and professional people and that they should speak for the area's economic interests, Luker declared.

In any activity, he commented, the results will be less desirable if persons involved do not take an active part in the outcome.

Meyer thought the merchants should not only have a voice in the formation of the general plan, but should be the major spokesman for the area.

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Bob Crowley agreed with the need for merchant contribution to the scheme. He noted, for instance, that the general plan's transportation subcommittee has recommended against additional roadways in the area. But a 24-hour traffic count at Soquel Drive and Porter Street clicked off 23,000 vehicles. That amounts to real traffic congestion, and that's bad for business, Crowley indicated.

Jack Beebe noted the same people against the new roads are the ones who are intent on maintaining Soquel's village atmosphere. But the two suggestions are at cross purposes, he observed, since there is no way a village character can be maintained in the face of the intense traffic flow that now courses through the downtown.

Soquel Village Businessmen's Assn. was adopted as the name for the new group. Officers were elected on a white ballot. In addition to Meyer, they are Beebe, vice president; Crowley, secretary, and Leland Sears, treasurer.

Additional board members elected at the meeting were Bud Thrift, Irvin Benesi and Marion Noland.

The group will meet at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the Soquel County Bank to formulate a report for inclusion in the general plan.

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