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McDonald's gets frosty council reception

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Ronald McDonald won't be joining the other clowns in downtown Santa Cruz.

McDonald's made a pitch Tuesday to build a fast-food restaurant in downtown Santa Cruz, but nauseated local leaders killed the idea faster than you can say "Do you want fries with that?"

McDonald's officials had their eye on property at Front Street and Cathcart Avenue, a location currently occupied by

the Pontiac Grill restaurant.

The hamburger giant was hoping to work a deal to demolish the Pontiac Grill and two popular businesses nearby, Cymbaline Records and the Thai restaurant Spices, to make room for a McDonald's outlet with drive-through window service. Big mistake, Ronald.

Real estate broker Jack Schneider made the pitch to members of the Santa Cruz City Council's redevelopment subcommittee.

Judging from the reaction, he might as well have suggested that Santa Cruz outlaw surfing.

"From a community character point of view, I think there would be enormous resistance to it," said Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews.

Councilman Neal Coonerty quickly remembered the area is in a flood plain and subject to strict building codes.

"I think there are some real hurdles," he said.

For 20 years, downtown Santa Cruz has been a haven for offbeat boutiques, street musicians and small, locally owned businesses. As the city rebuilds from the 1989 earthquake, local leaders are trying to keep that quintessential character.

It's not that the city is anti-fast food, said Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy, a vegetarian. In fact, there is a Taco Bell on Pacific Avenue.

But Santa Cruz has local rules outlaw-

ing drive-through windows in most of downtown, said Kennedy. And city leaders hope something a little more classy than a burger joint eventually will occupy the site, he said.

The odds for McDonald's there?

"Zilch," said Kennedy.

Schneider got the message.

"Nothing personal," he said, leaving the meeting. "I don't eat at McDonald's anyway."