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Library tops list for Capitola site

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CAPITOLA — A large regional branch library to serve mid-county is the top projected use for the city's newest property.

At least that was the consensus of 20 people who met Thursday night at a special meeting of the City Council.

The purpose was to come up with a "wish list," of sorts, for the 5-acre Wharf Road/Clares Street property, which Capitola bought for \$1.4 million last February. The city hopes to combine the uses with the 6½-acre Rispin Mansion property across the street.

The 20,000 to 24,000-square-foot regional branch library would fit in nicely with the master plan of the Santa Cruz County-City Library Board, said Robin Brooks, a former library director. By comparison, the Aptos branch is about 8,000 square feet and the main Santa Cruz branch about

49,000 square feet.

However, City Manager Steve Burrell said that because the main branch encompasses other uses, such as administrative offices, a 20,000 to 24,000-square-foot Capitola branch "might contain almost as much useable library space."

For the first time in several years, the Capitola council and the county Board of Supervisors appear to be on the same page concerning a mid-county library. Supervisors in January formally asked Capitola to consider a library for the Wharf Road/Clares Street site, and the city is starting to develop a site plan.

In the past, Capitola favored a small, 7,000-square-foot branch that the city could run on its own. A site near the Capitola Mall is even earmarked for it. However, that sentiment has changed.

Councilwoman Stephanie Harlan maintained a larger

branch is needed "so we won't have something that is out of date as soon as it's built."

Alice Thompson, a retired librarian, added that a library should be the number-one use of the property. "Here we are in Capitola, the most famous intellectual group in the county, and we don't have a library," she said to laughter.

Besides a library, suggestions included providing parking for both the library and whatever use the Rispin Mansion is eventually renovated into. A cultural center is foreseen for the 66-year-old mansion.

Other suggestions included a day-care center, picnic areas and open space and a fish hatchery on a portion of the Rispin site, which sits next to Soquel Creek.

Whatever the uses, though, participants were adamant that pedestrian access be enhanced by foot bridges across the creek.