

Group proposes alternatives to downtown garage

by Ramona Turner

SANTA CRUZ — The proposal floating around City Hall to replace the parking lot at Cedar and Cathcart streets with a five-story parking structure has some pro-alternative transportation supporters coming up with parking improvement ideas of their own.

About 20 people met Tuesday at a meeting hosted by the Campaign for Sensible Transportation to talk about cheaper, more efficient options than building a garage projected to cost \$21 million to construct.

Rick Longinotti, who's helping gather community input and alternatives to a parking structure, said he plans to have a video of the meeting aired on Community Television, as well as present his group's research to the Downtown Commission and the City Council.

This spring, Longinotti and the group polled 512 people who work in the downtown area about their commute habits and what it would take to change them for the better. The survey found about half of those live within three miles of downtown.

"My conclusion was that those people have options," Longinotti said, while noting survey respondents also said they would leave their vehicle at home if alternative transportation was more convenient, safe and affordable.

The options he proposed involve diverting the money the city would spend on the garage toward incentive programs to get people out of their cars.

"Pay people not to drive," he said. "PG&E realized it could make money by paying people to conserve, rather than building new power plants. That's cheaper for everyone."

Longinotti proposed the city use an alternative transportation model already perfected by UC Santa Cruz. That involves providing monthly bus passes to riders for \$5, community shared cars and emergency taxi service.

Melissa Casey lives and works downtown and thinks Longinotti and his survey are on the right track.

"If built the garage would destroy the quality of downtown," she said "Business people I've spoken with want customers to come here and have a good experience. If people can't find parking, that's not a good experience. But locals know the quality of downtown would change if a multi-level structure is built."