

## Can San Jose make downtown more inviting for the condo crowd?

By John Woolfolk  
Mercury News

Article Launched: 04/27/2008 01:41:00 AM PDT

Vincent Conditto moved last year into the 101 San Fernando luxury apartments and loves it. But he admits downtown San Jose's nightlife could use fewer noisy young drunks and more shopping and music for baby boomers like himself.

Dave Powell, who co-owns San Jose Bar and Grill, Tres Gringos and the VooDoo Lounge a few blocks away, has devoted 15 years to making downtown inviting to people like Conditto plus all sorts of others, and believes it's getting there.

With hundreds of new downtown condominiums nearing completion, city officials are trying to nurture a more vibrant 24-hour downtown for new residents like Conditto while still allowing establishments like Powell's to thrive. The city council on Tuesday will consider a package of proposals aimed at making downtown more inviting to young and old alike.

From shutting down sidewalk service at restaurants by midnight, to increasing the number of sidewalk vendors like hot dog carts and flower peddlers, the ideas are trying to strike a balance between lively city living and a peaceful place for more people to call home.

Downtown merchants aren't sure the proposals on balance will be much of an

improvement.

"It's a baby step forward," said San Jose Downtown Association Executive Director Scott Knies.

Opposition from bar owners and musicians prompted Mayor Chuck Reed and downtown Councilman Sam Liccardo to recommend a host of last-minute tweaks, including delaying discussion of a controversial music promoter licensing rule until May 20.

The downtown improvement efforts trace back to safety concerns that arose after a 2005 shooting in a parking lot near the former hip-hop Ambassador's Lounge injured three people, as well as periodic party mayhem on display during Mardi Gras or Cinco de Mayo.

Residents, merchants and city officials agreed that the downtown night scene dominated by youthful clubbers and police hovering to keep them under control was driving older and wealthier people to seek a more relaxed atmosphere in the suburbs.

### For an 'older crowd'

"We've got too narrow a nightlife," Reed said. Developers of downtown luxury homes want something that "caters to a little older crowd, people who can afford a condo."

But with hope that new residents will bring more business comes anxiety that they will phone in complaints about noisy downtown bars and clubs, driving them out of business.

"Underlying some of this stuff is a fear that we're not being suburban enough downtown to make people live downtown," said Chris Esparza, who owns the Naglee Park Garage eatery

Advertisement

# MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

# (800) 870-NEWS

## Subscribe today!

[www.mercurynews.com](http://www.mercurynews.com)



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

east of San Jose State University.

One proposal under consideration Tuesday would prohibit most outdoor sidewalk cafe tables at restaurants after midnight. Reed summed up the concern as "too many people, not enough food, too much alcohol." Police even suggested closing cafe tables at 10 p.m.

Powell's restaurants and the Britannia Arms have served outdoors until 2 a.m. without problems, and Liccardo has suggested a "grandfather" exemption for them. But Powell and Britannia Arms partner John Conway say the earlier closing time makes no sense in a city seeking a 24-hour downtown.

"It doesn't help downtown at all," Powell said. "People like to be outdoors. It's California."

### 'A real issue'

But downtown residents like Mike Reandeu, president of the South University Neighborhood Association, said late-night noise "is a real issue."

"I'm all for a 24-hour downtown," he said, "but it needs to be more sober."

Another controversial proposal would require music promoters to be licensed by police, something being tried or considered in a handful of other big cities, including San Diego, San Francisco and Chicago. Those paid to promote events like deejay dance parties or rock bands would have to be fingerprinted and licensed by the San Jose Police Department. That would cost about \$400, good for two years.

Police Lt. Dave Hober said the idea is to prevent

finger-pointing when concerts turn violent.

"What we consistently heard is we'd go to the club owners and they'd say, 'It was the promoter's fault and we don't know who they are,'" Hober said.

Merchants and club owners generally like the proposal, but some worry it may suffocate the local music scene.

"It kind of cripples the young entrepreneur that gets into the music or arts promotion," said Mauricio Mejia, co-owner of the Vault Ultra Lounge, "especially with the kind of fees they are talking about."

Promoters are troubled by the cost and liability issues. Barbara Wahli of Barb Rocks Presents worries that "the venue can pass the buck onto me, " while deejay Wendell Davis fears that "it's eliminating downtown nightlife by way of bureaucracy and red tape."

One proposal merchants had hoped for was a plan to make permanent the city's six-month "soft closing" experiment letting bars stay open an extra hour so patrons don't spill out onto the streets at 2 a.m. shortly after last call.

Merchants felt it made closing time more pleasant for their customers. But police say that while crime dropped, they don't attribute that to the program, which they said only increased overtime costs. Reed, Liccardo and others recommend making the later closing time permanent, but with bars helping pay for policing costs.

Condito, a 54-year-old self-employed engineer, credits the city for trying to enliven downtown, but isn't so sure about all the proposed regulations. He'd like to see more stores and

Advertisement

# MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

# (800) 870-NEWS

## Subscribe today!

[www.mercurynews.com](http://www.mercurynews.com)



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

maybe a concert theater like San Francisco's Fillmore.

"I'm for keeping 24-hour nightlife," Conditto said. "It would just be nice if a whole bunch of 30-year-old and 50-year-old people came in."

Contact John Woolfolk at [jwoolfolk@mercurynews.com](mailto:jwoolfolk@mercurynews.com) or (408) 975-9346.

Advertisement

# MercuryNews.com

The Mercury News

# (800) 870-NEWS

## Subscribe today!

[www.mercurynews.com](http://www.mercurynews.com)



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™