

UCSC plan for garage stirs tension

UCSC Growth
City at odds with campus' growth rate

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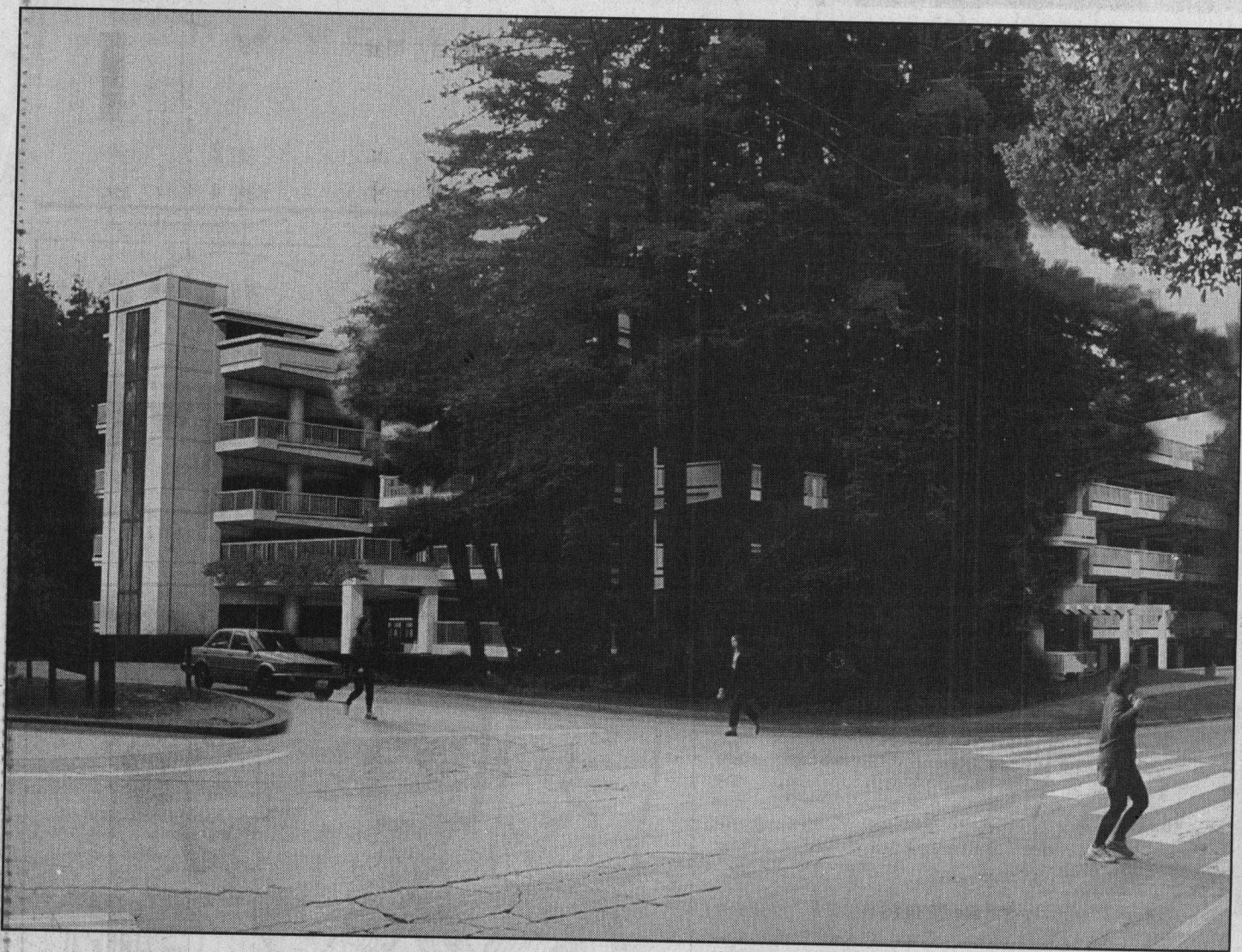
SANTA CRUZ — City officials are upset with a plan to build a six-story parking garage at UC Santa Cruz, creating additional town-gown tensions as the city and university prepare for a new round of talks about growth and its side effects.

Relations between the city and UCSC have been hot and cold over the years, with university growth presenting a dilemma for city officials committed to slow growth. And with the university expected to grow by almost 5,000 students in the next five years and the City Council now dominated by growth opponents, no one's betting on easy solutions.

An April 6 public meeting between the City Council and UCSC officials will be held

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An artist's view of what the UC Santa Cruz six-deck, 500-car garage would look like.

Garage

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to address some of the ongoing issues between the two entities. It will be at 7 p.m. on campus in the Red Room at College Eight, 201 Student Commons.

"We are entering a new phase with them," said Councilman (and UCSC instructor) Tim Fitzmaurice. "Just as we look at ourselves as on the edges of our own buildout, they are growing more. They have a lot of interest in growth, and we have a lot of interest in managing growth."

Liz Irwin, UCSC's public information officer, said the April 6 meeting should help clarify the city-UCSC relationship.

"There are issues we are facing together," Irwin said. "The expectation is that the relationship between us will build and continue in the favorable way it has. And we are eager to show our good faith."

Since 1988, the city and university have met yearly, but the April 6 meeting is the last under that schedule. Campus officials have agreed to start meeting with the city once every two months, a deal worked out between Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood and Mayor Katherine Beiers.

The talks are important because the university enjoys special status. While it is an integral part of the city's economic, cultural and political character, it is also largely outside the city's bureaucratic jurisdiction. Though UCSC is in the city, city officials cannot stop development there because the campus is run by the state.

Elected officials note, however, that they do have some measure of political power that can be used to persuade if not regulate.

Fitzmaurice and council colleagues Christopher Krohn and Keith Sugar were elected in November partially on a slow-growth platform, including a plank to make UCSC more accountable about how

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Mike Rotkin

its decisions affect the city.

The city's latest concern is the university's plan to build a six-deck, 500-car parking structure on campus. Though they have no ultimate say, the City Council and City Transportation Commission reviewed the environmental-impact report and concluded instead that the university should pursue off-site park-and-ride lots and establish new express bus routes tailored to UCSC staff and students.

The council also voted unanimously last week to ask campus officials to meet with nearby residents and work on a more comprehensive transportation plan.

Councilmembers Fitzmaurice and Mike Rotkin, both instructors at the university, say the parking garage would lead to more parking garages and higher student transportation fees, eventually adding traffic to nearby residential streets.

"This (the garage) is a real disaster," Rotkin said. "And it's not a town vs. gown thing, and I'm not looking to pick a fight. But transportation and housing require a serious plan and big money. They (UCSC) are blindly walking down a cliff here."

Fitzmaurice said the university needs to put more time and effort into off-campus parking and improving transit service. That won't be easy or inexpensive but will make more sense in the long run, he said.

"We do need a thorough study of options," he said.

The draft environmental-impact report, however, says the garage at Heller and McLaughlin drives would help the university meet long-range plans for an expanding campus. Current enrollment of almost 10,600 is expected to reach 15,000 by 2005.

On-campus parking is now limited to 5,200 spaces for the students and 3,000 employees.

Some at City Hall say the debate over the garage could lead to a battle like the one in 1988, when the city sued over construction of College Eight because the environmental-impact report did not address the impact on the city.

The city said it would not drop the lawsuit until the university agreed to help pay its fair share for impacts to city services. As part of an eventual settlement, the university agreed to yearly meetings with the city and to pay "fair share" for upgrading city water services and developing new water sources, in addition to helping pay for some traffic improvements.

Some council members say they believe the parking garage already is a "done deal" despite the city's concerns. UCSC's Irwin said the environmental-review process is continuing and the UC Board of Regents will make the final decision.

While it's too early to predict whether a lawsuit is coming, the council appears united against the garage.

"The EIR is completely inadequate," Rotkin said. "And if the university won't open it up more, the city will have to take more drastic efforts. Right now I don't know what that would lead to."