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There's still commercial space available in the La Manzana complex, but there's also a new owner.

La Manzana complex sold

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The La Manzana shopping complex in downtown Watsonville is being sold to Barry Swenson, the same builder who plans to put a shopping center in the 200 block of Main Street.

Bill Ryan, Swenson's project manager for La Manzana, confirmed yesterday that the company is in the process of buying the com-

plex from Pacific Western Bank; he expects escrow to close around the end of the month.

Swenson stepped into the picture after a deal between the bank and Stella and Romero Romo fell through earlier this fall. The Romos

operate several downtown businesses.

The bank has owned La Manzana since 1986, when it foreclosed on the original owners, Manuel and Alice Santana. The Santanas, who own restaurants in Aptos and San Juan Bautista, opened La Manzana in 1985 with their restaurant (also named La Manzana) as the focal point.

The center, which has a number of small shops and offices around a courtyard, was in trouble almost from the day it opened. People had difficulty finding it (there were no signs on Main Street until just before the foreclosure), and the center was beset with high turnover and vacancy rates.

Ryan was reluctant to dis-

cuss details of Swenson's plans until escrow closes; he said "cosmetic rehabilitation" is planned, but no major changes.

The 26,000-square-foot center is 52 percent leased, said Roy Lundstedt of Blickman-Turkus Real Estate, the leasing agent for La Manzana. Two businesses have moved into the complex since Blickman-Turkus became the leasing agent early this year.

About half the unleased space is the spot where Santana's restaurant stood. Project manager Ryan said another restaurant may go in there, but other possibilities aren't being ruled out for the site.

Lundstedt would like to see the Romos operate the restaurant, but said they aren't interested if they don't own the complex. The Romos own Jalisco Restaurant on Main Street.

The current tenants are mostly small shops, plus 2,200 square feet of office space leased by the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and the Watsonville center for Cabrillo College. Lundstedt said there are plans to put in a 916-square-foot bookstore, and talks have been held with some doctors about putting in a small clinic.

"We get at least two calls a week" from people seriously interested in leasing at La Manzana, Lundstedt said. Once the ownership is resolved, he said, he expects even more interest.