

# Vacant lot finally fenced off

*Pacific Avenue*

## Santa Cruz site attracted vagrants

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The vacant downtown Santa Cruz parking lot where Ford's department store once stood — lately a hangout for scruffy youths and a headache for mer-

chants and police — has been fenced off.

Developer Barry Swenson, who along with the Santa Cruz Seaside Co. bought the property last month, erected a plywood barrier Wednesday around the front of

the lot and closed most of it from the rear with chain-link fence.

"We basically wanted to make the site safe for our construction activities and so we can show the piece safely," said project manager Chris Mion. "When you've got

a lot of debris all over the site, it doesn't show well."

City officials, police and merchants had been growing anxious over the empty lot at Pacific Avenue and Cathcart Street, dubbed "hippie corner" by itinerant Grateful Dead fans. Merchants complained that vagrants loitering in and around it were scaring

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away shoppers. Police said it was a growing nexus of drug dealing and petty crime.

The gathering of layabouts at the lot, vacant since the 1989 earthquake destroyed Ford's, was widely blamed for the failure of the previous owner to attract another department store to the

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## Developer fences off vacant lot in downtown Santa Cruz

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site. A 1994 deal with Ross clothing stores reportedly evaporated after company executives viewed the scene, although the official explanation was concern over competition with the company's Capitola store.

In February, while the sale of the lot to Swenson and the Seaside Co. was pending, the city proposed putting its own fence around the lot. But the city coun-

cil narrowly rejected the plan, with Councilman Scott Kennedy saying it "didn't seem like a smart way to spend a few thousand dollars."

Downtown merchants who were dismayed by that decision were thrilled about the new fence.

"I was just delighted to see it," said John Lisher, owner of Artisans on Pacific Avenue. "I think anything to clean up that property would be worthwhile. I think it

will help a lot."

Deputy Police Chief Jeff Locke said many of the street people who had been causing trouble at the corner lot have been dispersing to nearby parking lots lately. It is unclear what impact the fence will have on downtown

crime, he said.

"We'll just wait and see," Locke said.

The sale of the lot means the city will lose the 59 public parking spaces on the property that the city had used under an agreement with the previous owner.

## New health officer says education is key

MODESTO (AP) — Alvaro Garza, 46, Stanislaus County's new public health officer, says he

wants to educate families on preventing drug abuse and teen pregnancy when he assumes his post.