

Plans for 'new downtown' unveiled for businessmen

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

A bold scenario of a new central business district was unveiled Wednesday afternoon to downtown businessmen and property owners.

"There will be no place like it anywhere else in California," an architect told members of the Chamber of Commerce's blue-ribbon committee on downtown revitalization.

Val Charn, an architect with Townscape of Los Gatos, contended that the downtown "is not that far away from looking nice because the architecture is nice — it's just been buried."

In addition to presenting color drawings illustrating how the facades of downtown buildings could be "rehabilitated," Charn and his colleague Len McVicar proposed three new

commercial development areas for the central business district. These include:

—A "Mercado del Mundo," which would be an "international marketplace" located south of Riverside Drive and west of Main Street. McVicar said he felt this development would be the main drawing card of the downtown. It would attract shoppers from "all over the region," he said.

—An "Old Watsonville Market," which would consist of a cluster of shops having a Victorian architectural theme. The proposed site is south of City Hall, bounded by Main Street, Riverside Drive, Union Street and Central Avenue.

—A new department store, supermarket and drug store which would be located in an area bounded generally by Union Street, Riverside Drive and Rodriguez Street. The proposed name for the shopping center is "Riverside Plaza."

Townscape is proposing that Main Street be reduced to one lane in each direction from Freedom Boulevard to Central Avenue, with the street being closed to all traffic south of Central. The firm says extensive landscaping and other public improvements on Main Street would cost about \$1.6 million.

Making Main Street pedestrian-oriented, of course, would require removing the state highway designation from the street. But, according to McVicar and Charn, the state

transportation department (Caltrans) has indicated to their firm that it would be willing to put the designation on Rodriguez Street, which would be made a four-lane highway.

"This street would carry the bulk of the traffic through the downtown," Charn said. A "secondary" north-south traffic corridor, he said, would be Union, Alexander and Brennan streets on the east side of town. This, of course, would require realigning Union and Alexander at Beach Street. The City Council has already earmarked money for the project.

The council had planned on extending Union Street through the telephone building, with the extension hooking up with Alexander Street just south of Lake Avenue. But the consultants are recommending what they think will be an easier and cheaper plan. The suggestion is simply to utilize a vacant lot (just north of the Valley National Bank on Union Street) to connect Alexander and Union.

The consultants also suggest that both Lake and Beach be made two-way again. Lake, they say, should be made two lanes in each direction and Beach one lane in each direction.

City Manager James Buell told the blue-ribbon committee that even if the Jarvis-Gann initiative passes on June 6, the city would probably be able to come

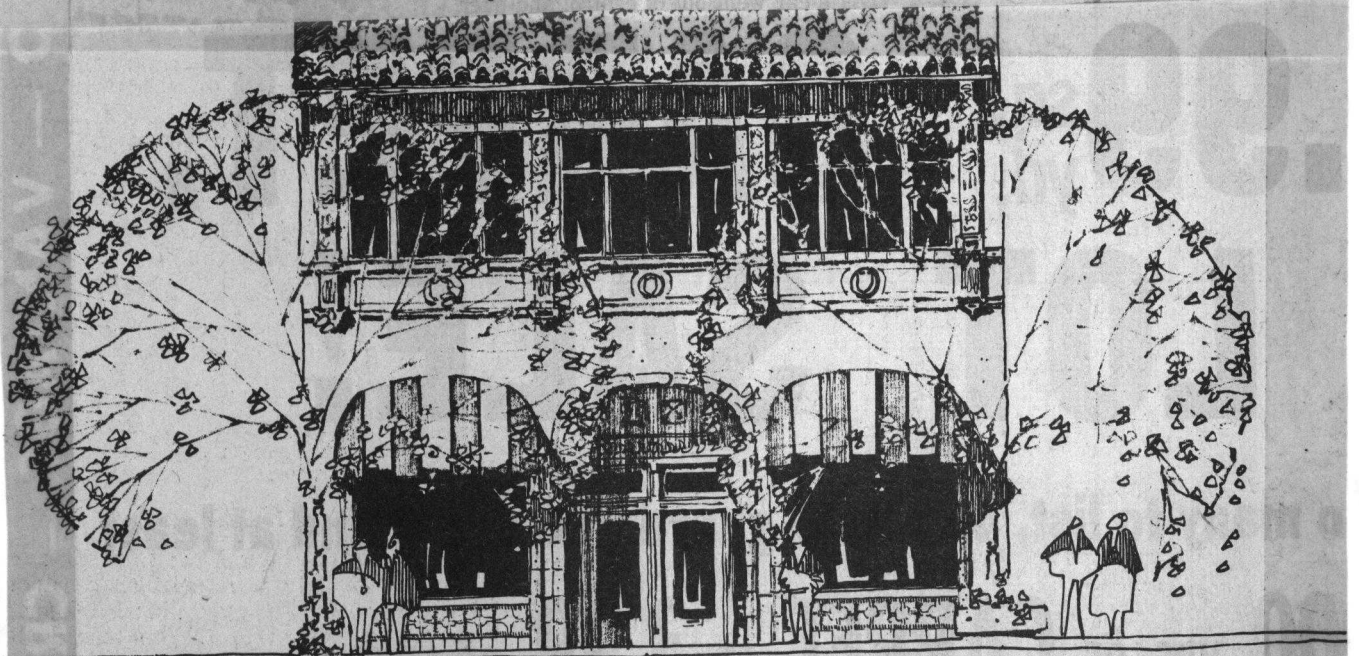
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REFERENCE



Artist's conception of a spruced-up Mansion House.



A "rehabilitated" Meadow Gold Milk building, located on the west side of Main Street's 400 block.



An architect's conception of the proposed "Old Watsonville Market."

Downtown renovation plan

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up with other ways to finance redevelopment. But, he contended, if the property-tax limitation initiative passes, it will take a lot longer to get a project off the ground.

Buell indicated that if Jarvis-Gann fails, the city will be able to pump an enormous amount of money into the downtown almost immediately. The city's redevelopment kitty, he said, has about \$1 million in it. This could be used to buy tax increment bonds. (The general rule of thumb is that cities can buy bonds for between 7 and 10 times the amount they have in redevelopment coffers.)

If Jarvis-Gann passes, however, the city would be forced to rely on either federal funds or local property-owner assessment districts.

Cynthia DeLauney, owner of a tax and bookkeeping service at 456 Main Street, reminded Buell that most of the stores downtown are small and the owners have limited resources. "Most of us are ma and pa type shops," she said.

Mrs. DeLauney remarked that the

property owners downtown could end up paying "all assessment (levies) and hardly any taxes."

Another property owner expressing concern was Carlos Rico, owner of La Flor Del Valle on Union Street. He noted that he had spent a lot of money recently fixing up his store, and wondered aloud where his grocery store would fit into the scheme of things.

Rico said he was afraid the store would be cut off from the other commercial areas. Architect McVicar, however, assured him that his business would probably increase — even if other grocery stores move into the downtown.

Both Rico and Mario Carabarin, part owner of the Mona Lisa Cafe, said they were concerned what would happen to all the businesses on the southern end of Main Street.

City Manager Buell said, however, that the city would make every effort to find new locations for all displaced businesses presently in the downtown.

No mention was made at yesterday's meeting of a "beer hall" that was recently okaved by a 4-3 vote of the City

Council. The bar was approved for a site just west of Main Street on Riverside Drive, but the site lies within the proposed "Riverside Plaza," and thus would be an incompatible land use.

When the beer hall proposal came to the council, the city staff had recommended that the applicant wait 60 days. But the majority of the council didn't accept the staff's recommendation. However, Mayor Bill Johnston, Rex Clark and Don Santi voted to follow the recommendation, saying approval of the bar would throw a "monkey wrench" in the architect's master plan.

Buell said after the meeting yesterday that the council's decision was "unfortunate." But he said he hoped something could be worked out.

Townscape's preliminary master plan will be presented to the council at a meeting either at the end of this month or the beginning of June, Buell said. Before the final plan is approved, he said, the public will be invited to give their comments before the Planning Commission as well as the council.