

# Watsonville vetoes two-lane Main Street

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It doesn't look like Main Street will be converted to a two-lane commercial strip and semi-mall as some downtown merchants had hoped. But there still may be some hope for giving the street and its store fronts a new look to attract more shoppers.

Watsonville City Council members rejected the idea last night of converting a portion of Main Street to two lanes, a proposal that was an integral part of the semi-mall plan.

But representatives of downtown business owners appeared satisfied that the council is at least interested in developing a new look for Main Street. And that, the merchants say, will help business.

The merchants want to create

a more attractive climate for shoppers by adding landscaping, lighting, and even some fresh paint and some architectural changes, such as awnings that protect shoppers from rain and sun.

The council still hasn't committed a penny to the downtown beautification plan, which outlines a nearly \$3 million facelift of three blocks on Main Street between Second and West Fifth streets. There also is no established method of paying for the project, for which the merchants are willing to ante 50 percent of the cost.

Despite the merchants' enthusiasm last night for the downtown improvements, the plan didn't exactly get a rousing show of support from the council, which was wearing a different hat last night and acting as the city's Redevelopment

Agency.

There is still a question as to whether the agency has enough money left over from its 200-block redevelopment efforts to make any contribution to the beautification project.

Nearly \$5 million is tied up in the city's effort to bulldoze that entire block, move or buy the businesses, build a post office, and attract some kind of commercial development to the rest of the block.

Agency members said they support downtown beautification, but stopped short of hiring a local architect to draw up plans for bringing it about. They agreed instead to have the Redevelopment Advisory Committee study the idea and return with some specific recommendations.

But agency members did that after they decided to keep Main

Street a four-lane road, which essentially kills the merchants' hopes for a two-lane strip. The council decided that the city's demand for major traffic corridors downtown would increase with expected growth in the coming years.

City Manager John Radin said a two-lane Main Street would become nothing more than a parking lot during peak hours, and that four lanes will be needed even if surrounding streets are widened.

Even though that cuts into the heart of the semi-mall plan, business owner Mark Frederickson, who is chairman of the agency's advisory committee, said there are still a number of things that can be done to make Main Street a more attractive shopping area.