

Site cleared at Merrill College to begin improvements

114 trees felled for central courtyard; work expected to finish in 2015



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

An arborist uses a chain saw to fell a tree at Merrill College at UC Santa Cruz on Saturday.

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — Work has begun at UC Santa Cruz to prepare for renovations to the residential areas of one of oldest colleges on campus.

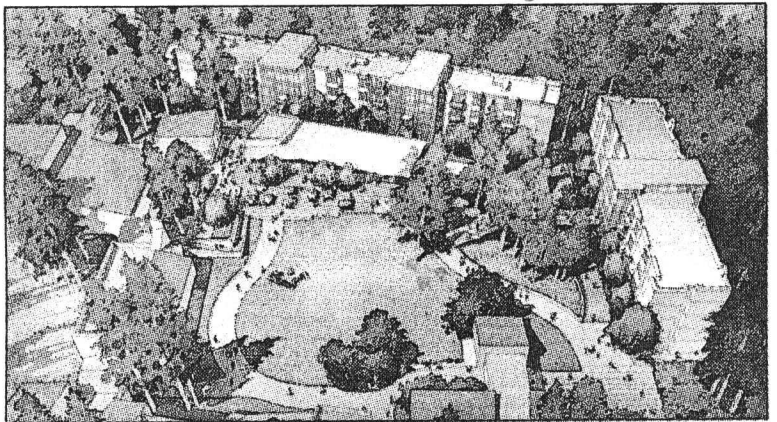
The Merrill Residence Halls Capital Renewal Project, expected to be completed in 2015, will feature renovations to four residence halls and an apartment building to accommodate 60 new student beds at the college, which was built in 1968. The plans, designed to improve access for the disabled and make community spaces more functional, also calls for a new three-story Plaza Building to replace a restaurant and student activities building.

The creation of a central courtyard required the cutting down of 114 trees, mostly new-growth redwoods, this past week as students were on spring break. The trees will be replaced with about 50 live oaks and other types of trees, UCSC spokesman Jim Burns said.

"That will provide more of an open, sunnier area for student gathering and programming," Burns said. "A desire of this project is to really create a better central area for the college."

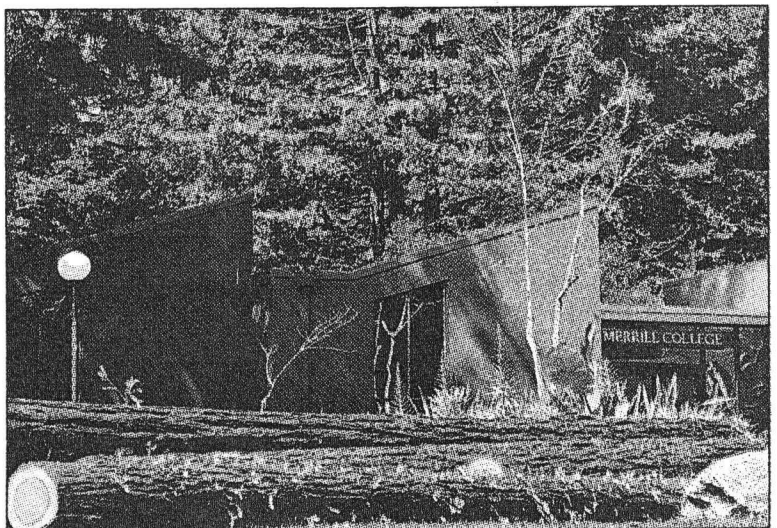
The UC Regents delegated authority to approve the plans to UCSC Chancellor George Blumenthal, who OK'd the proposal in December. Site preparation largely will get under way this summer.

Renovations will cost an estimated \$45 million, financed externally with help from the university's Office of the President, and aren't expected to lead to an increase in student housing rates, Burns said.



UCSC/CONTRIBUTED

This is an artist's rendering of the new Merrill College.



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

A group of felled trees lay in front of Merrill College, where work to cut down 114 trees took place Saturday.

UCSC

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In addition to tackling deferred maintenance and complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, a key reason the campus sought the renovations was to provide new beds as required by a 2008 settlement agreement with the city and county of Santa Cruz over growth plans, Burns said.

The pact requires UCSC to house two-thirds of growth above 15,000 students, with a maximum student population not to exceed 20,000 by 2020.

"Every bed that is created on campus reduces the traffic, water, housing and quality-of-life issues in the city," said former Mayor Ryan Coonerty, who helped broker the deal with Blumenthal.

UCSC has eyed undeveloped land in a northern corner of campus to build new facilities to accommodate growth, but the move requires the extension of city water and sewer service outside current boundaries. The city and university have



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

An arborist works to secure tree limbs during the felling of 114 trees at Merrill College at UC Santa Cruz Saturday.

applied to a local commission for an extension, but the matter is on hold as they fight an appellate court's determination that a state-mandated environmental analysis of the plans was flawed.

Sabrina Teller, an attorney for the city, said she expects to file a petition with the California Supreme Court on

Tuesday, challenging the 6th District Court of Appeal's call for an option that provides less water annually than the 100 million gallons additionally requested by UCSC.

At Merrill College, the renovations will not only add beds but improve water and energy efficiency, as

well as optimize natural light, according to UCSC. The 7,200-square-foot Plaza Building will feature a new eatery that the current proprietor, Tacos Moreno, can apply to operate.

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