

Panel asks developers to redo design for vacant lot

Revised condo project proposed for key Pacific Avenue location

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✓ Pacific Avenue 5-6-11
SANTA CRUZ — The Planning Commission sent the developers of a downtown condominium and commercial proposal back to the drawing board Thursday on plans to build up a landmark lot left largely vacant since the 1989 earthquake.

The panel voted to recommend the City Council approve a five-year development agreement with builders of the proposed Park Place project at 1547 Pacific Ave. The commission agreed to postpone consideration of permits for the project until parts of the plan are redesigned to meet downtown development standards.

Planning staff want to see higher-quality building materials, an increase in height for commercial space and altered

DOWNTOWN

Continued from B1

window design. Planners also want deeper setbacks for some architectural elements to reduce the building's flatness.

"We don't think the project is quite there yet, but we think it can get there with some work," Planning Director Juliana Rebagliati said.

The site once contained buildings for Bookshop Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Co., which were

destroyed during the Loma Prieta earthquake. Two employees of the coffee shop died among the rubble.

After the earthquake flattened large parts of downtown, the city passed a raft of standards for rebuilding. The bookshop coffee company and a number of other businesses relocated on Pacific Avenue as the corridor was reconstructed.

In October 2006, the council approved a seven-story mixed-use building for the 1547 Pacific Ave. site stretching back to Cedar Street that included 58 residential units and 11,757

square feet of commercial space. The Redevelopment Agency loaned the builders \$220,000 as a pre-development loan last year to be repaid over three years.

Permits expire in October, but the developers said the persistently slow economy has made the project unaffordable.

"That building is not going to happen," said developer Bill Brooks, who bought the 25,000-square-foot parcel about seven years ago.

Brooks and business partner Norman Schwartz have proposed building a five-story building with 66 residen-

tial units, eight more than the earlier project, and just 4,510 square feet of retail space with less parking. The proposed development agreement to continue revising the project includes a requirement for 60 to 70 residential units and no less than 5,100 square feet of commercial space.

"This is a legacy piece of property, one of more significant piece of property on the whole mall and Santa Cruz in general," said Commissioner Bill Schultz, citing a number of architectural criticisms. "I don't think anyone is trying very hard here."

SEE DOWNTOWN ON B3