

RECENT CRIMES HAVE BUSINESS OWNERS, POLICE AND THE CITY OF SANTA CRUZ WONDERING ...

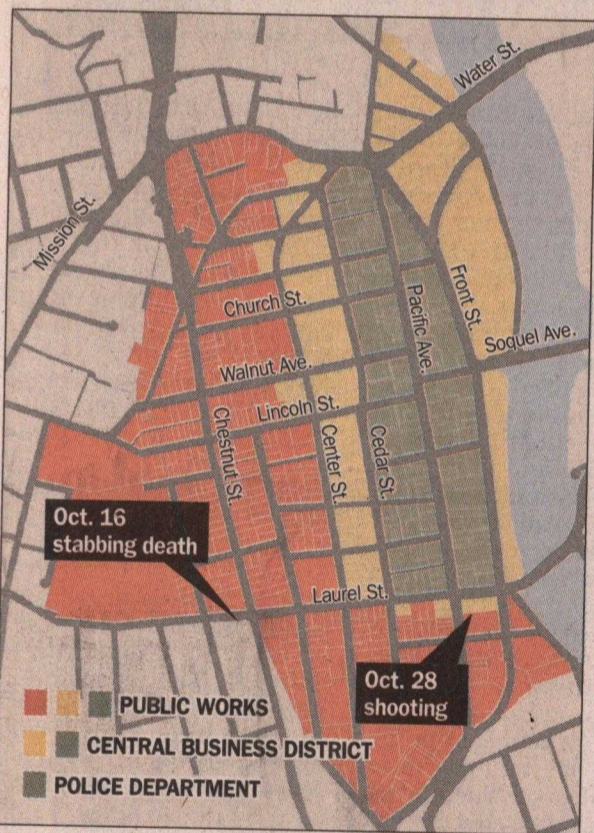
WHERE IS DOWNTOWN?



Police regard downtown as Pacific Avenue and one block on either side, from Water Street to Laurel Street. Businesses, council members and others disagree. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

WHAT SOME SC AGENCIES CONSIDER 'DOWNTOWN'

Boundary shifts depending on whom you ask, not to everyone's delight



ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL GRAPHIC

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER
gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — For those invested in downtown, the reputation of their neighborhood can influence whether shoppers spend money, where diners go for lunch or police dedicate patrols to keeping a lid on illegal behavior.

But there are no hard and fast borders. The police department, a store manager and City Councilman draw the lines differently. Still, events on Laurel and Chestnut streets can affect a Pacific Avenue block near Water Street, 13 blocks away.

That's what happened last month when the stabbing death of a 16-year-old on the corner of Laurel and Chestnut streets and a double-shooting on Laurel and Pacific Avenue worried shoppers and shop owners near the Town Clock.

"To some extent, downtown is in the eye of the beholder," said Mayor Cynthia Mathews, who loosely defined the neighborhood as "Mission (Street) to the Santa Cruz High area, down to the Laurel area, over to the river."

By Mathews' definition, the stabbing and shooting would be on the outskirts of downtown, a designation some don't

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manager of Old School Shoes

agree with.

The definition of downtown Santa Cruz varies depending on whether one consults the mayor, Public Works Department, a police officer or business owner. All have different definitions depending on priorities and, for some, profit.

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DOWNTOWN

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For Santa Cruz police, for example, the downtown beat includes Pacific Avenue from Water to Laurel streets, and one block off Pacific in either direction. By that account, neither the stabbing nor the shooting happened within downtown's borders.

That 18-block beat "has been defined for over 30 years," said police spokesman Zach Friend. With seven officers assigned to the area, "it has the highest number of officers assigned to the smallest geographic location" of

any neighborhood in town, he said.

For shops in the city's Business Improvement District, though, downtown's borders stretch a little farther. That district, whose stores and restaurants chip in to pay for parking and promotions, reaches from North Pacific Avenue near Lenz Arts past Laurel Street to just before Spruce Street, and from Center Street to the San Lorenzo River.

The district includes the sidewalk where two men were shot. It does not, however, include the corner where the 16-year-old was stabbed to death.

The city's Public Works map, on the other hand,

labels Water Street, the base of Beach Hill, the San Lorenzo River and Chestnut Street as downtown's borders — thus including the locations of both crimes.

Councilman Tony Madrigal said he defines downtown as the entire stretch of Pacific Avenue, and the San Lorenzo River to Chestnut Street.

But he agreed that the definition varies depending on whom you ask.

"Let's face it, some folks don't want to consider themselves downtown," Madrigal said, because of its reputation for aggressive panhandling, harassing teenagers and, most recently, violence. Madrigal said he considered both

the stabbing and the shooting to have occurred downtown.

Sonja Brunner, manager of Old School Shoes on the corner of Pacific Avenue and Cathcart Street, said she shares Madrigal's definition of downtown's borders. But she said social problems, not the neighborhood, were responsible for last month's violence.

"In light of recent crimes, it's drugs that created that problem to happen, not the downtown area, not that neighborhood," she said. "It was some kids in gangs. It was the gang culture and mentality that created that incident to happen, not the downtown district. That's how I see it."