

Vision of Mall comes into focus

Vision Santa Cruz reaches 'consensus' on downtown's future

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SANTA CRUZ — Sweeping statements of agreement on rebuilding downtown Santa Cruz were adopted by the Vision Santa Cruz task force Monday night.

Using a painstaking consensus process, the 36 members revised and clarified statements of principles covering parking, housing, single room occupancy hotels and building heights in a four-hour meeting at Loudon Nelson Community Center.

Irene Vanderzande, a Santa Cruz consultant chosen to act as facilitator prefaced the session by asking the task force members to strive for agreement.

"This is not the place to make speeches," she said. "We're here to get a consensus."

Initial statements adopted from the findings of numerous committees on the key subjects were drafted by a 10-member "Compilation Committee." Individual task force members were given the opportunity to discuss the wordings and arrived at the following conclusions:

clusions:

- Parking — Task force members agreed the "parking district approach" to an overall parking plan for downtown was essential and should be maintained.

In general, it was agreed the planning strategy would be a flexible approach, planning for the maximum future demand but building now for the short-term need.

They recommended keeping in place existing parking ratios for retail and commercial use, saying change should not take place without further in-depth analysis.

Concerning residential parking, the task force recommended those projects "buy into" the parking district and urged further study on the issue.

- Housing — The task force endorsed the notion that it was "a central element" of the downtown recovery.

In rebuilding, the task force said a mix of housing should be developed that includes new housing, condominiums, apartments and single residency occupancy hotels,

and recommended the city reaffirm its commitment to the city ordinance that developments of five units or more be 15 percent "affordable."

It also said a study should be developed to look into the feasibility of encouraging housing south of Laurel Street along the San Lorenzo River and Front Street, adjacent to Zanotto's market.

- Single-room occupancy hotels — The task force adopted a statement saying they "provide a valuable type of affordable housing, close to services and transit, which appeals to several different populations, including seniors, working people, students, people with disabilities and travelers."

It also recommended the number of these types of units destroyed by the quake be replaced with similar units, dispersed throughout the downtown, and that incentives for realizing this goal be developed.

- Building heights — Task force members agreed those up to three stories tall are generally the "appropriate" standard.

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The maximum height should be five stories, or up to 60 feet, with some modest leeway to accommodate requirements such as retail first floors, office space needs, or lobbies.

In addition, the task force recommends the minimum building height on the east side of Cedar street and the rest of the downtown area east of Cedar should be two stories, with no minimum on the

west side.

The task force said building heights should not completely shade public spaces during midday hours.

Next week, the "Compilation Committee" will return with drafts covering open space, street and traffic circulation, landscaping, and so-called "opportunity sites"—the notion of combining various properties to create larger developments.

Despite some lengthy discussion

over phrases and semantics, task force members agreed they had accomplished much during the session.

"Just think, a few weeks ago we couldn't even decide on a name," James Pepper said.

The task force agreed to meet again 6 p.m. Monday at the Civic Auditorium in what may be one of their final meetings before the Vision Santa Cruz recommendations are sent to the City Council for consideration May 8.