

Diverse group puts together plan for Santa Cruz downtown

By PAUL BEATTY

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SANTA CRUZ — An area plan for downtown is ready and its writers say that putting it together was a lesson in bringing different types of people with different interests together.

It brought business people and downtown residents to the planning table for a series of meetings last fall and out of it came the realization that both groups basically want to enhance an already improving downtown area.

"We ended seeing we had a common interest," says downtown resident Cynthia Mathews, one of the planners.

"That common interest is that we don't want a failing business section next door and they don't want a slum."

City senior planner Joe Hall says, "The downtown of Santa Cruz from the task force's point of view is a special kind of area. They felt they wanted their recommendation not to change the focus of downtown, but simply to make it an easier place to get to, park next to and live in.

"It's the first time that all the various residential and business interests in the downtown area have been given a chance to discuss and resolve the issues of downtown."

The plan breaks the downtown area into five sub-areas: the downtown core, the downtown neighborhood, North River Street, Mission Hill and South Pacific Avenue.

It recommends widening River Street and zoning that could allow high density housing. It recommends a strong effort toward more parking in the downtown core and neighborhood area.

"And, there is a fantasy section of the plan — plans over a long period of time — for enhancing the town clock and Abbott Square areas," Hall says.

Other parts of the plan also have Mathews saying, "It's a kind of getting back to what Chuck Abbott's vision was.

"He's mostly remembered as the father of the mall, but he and his wife Esther led the restoration of the downtown residential area as well.

"I think people have missed it, but

Chuck saw it. You can't have a healthy commercial district without having a healthy downtown residential area as well."

The plan has evolved from existing plans and has had a lot of help from city staff members.

The people working on it were Deedie Calmes, Marilyn Frame, John Gamman, John Hofacre, Kandy Martin, Paul Niebanck, Elizabeth Powers, Lionel Stoloff, Peder Talbert, Ed VanDerZande and Mathews.

Staff came from the city administrator's office, planning, parks, water and public works.

The plan now begins its way through the city process and the first public hearing is expected in June or July before the planning commission. The commission will hold workshops first.

Ultimately, the plan needs approval of the City Council.

Sub-area concerns and recommendations are:

Downtown core — Improving the economic life and social atmosphere of the

Pacific Garden Mall and the city should provide an efficient traffic system and ample parking.

Additional objectives include coordinating future land uses with the economic opportunities and to enhance the overall appearance of the downtown while deciding the ultimate boundaries of the mall.

North River Street — This area includes considerable vacant land and plans must

enhance its economic potential, improve traffic and make provisions for housing.

South Pacific Avenue — This area presents the challenge of keeping the automobile dealerships compatibly with housing and using the sub-area's vacant lands for visitor serving. A general beautification of the area is needed.

Downtown Neighborhood — Parking and restoration.

Mission Hill — Parking. Also, pressure

on residential use "may come from development of the Neary-Rodriguez Adobe as a state park. An objective is to accommodate increased public use of the adobe while maintaining the integrity of the adjacent historic neighborhood.

Hall sums it up, "It's the first time that all the various residential and business interests in the downtown area have been given a chance to discuss and resolve the issues of downtown."

REFERENCE

APTOC BRANCH