

# Rebuilding Main Street

EARTHQUAKE '89 - Watsonville rebuilding

## 'Radical' change urged for Watsonville downtown

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WATSONVILLE — Downtown property owners are forming a private corporation to rebuild a two-block area of quake-damaged Main Street, using private money from land owners.

The plan, which is still in the formative stages, calls for remaking downtown's base into small-scale retail and commercial businesses to serve the residents living in the core of Watsonville. One-bedroom apartments would be included above the new buildings, with a park and parking spaces conveniently located.

The architects of the plan are John Fry, president of Construction/Development/Management Corp., and Tony Campos, a city councilman and realtor.

Fry, whose company has built a shopping center, business park and two housing developments at Green Valley and Main Street, said downtown must find a way to compete with other development.

"Many people think downtown should serve the entire Pajaro Valley, but it doesn't," Fry said. "There's an outflow of money to Aromas, Salinas and Monterey."

Fry believes the downtown merchants should refocus their thinking and branch into the housing and office market to recoup what they're losing in retail sales.

Fry wants the project to be a "manageable" one,

and is eyeing the 400 block of Main Street, including Rodriguez to Union streets.

He envisions Main Street becoming two lanes into downtown and one lane out, with parking on one side. Most of the traffic would be diverted to the side streets.

"The flaw in the idea is the landowners are the key people and there has not been a formal presentation to the landowners," he said. "That's going to happen next week."

Campos said he's talked with the "major players" and all have indicated their willingness to listen to the proposal.

Marie Devery, co-owner of the Lettunich Building that survived the earthquake, said she hadn't been briefed on it, but thought it was a "great idea."

Campos has also talked with property owners on the 300 block of Main Street who are interested in the tentative plan.

"This is really a radical idea," Campos said. "We're talking about everybody having control over their own building, but putting it to work in an overall plan for downtown."

Fry said the plan must "meet the needs of the community.

"That means we need to include affordable housing, responsive retail, accessible parking and an economic business base," he said.

"Another way of looking at downtown is that downtown was dying and it won't return to a vibrant retail center," Fry said.

"The plan we're looking at is on a faster track than redevelopment. ... We'd like to see this fully under construction by this time next year."

Campos said the main worry expressed by property owners about the redevelopment process is that it takes too long.

"The 200 block of Main Street (the city's redevelopment project) has taken five years or more and it's still vacant," Campos said. "These people don't want to be waiting here for five to 10 years."

The other reason to go private is that property owners can retain control over their projects.

"If everyone wants to cut out their own agenda, it won't get built. It will turn into another Coalinga," said Fry. He was referring to the slow-moving rebuilding effort under way in that Central Valley city which was destroyed by an earthquake six years ago.

Fry said he's aiming for an economic base that serves a 12-block radius and builds upon small retail shops, cafes and services, such as banks and insurance and travel offices.

"We need to put in housing that makes downtown viable at night," he said. "I'm looking at single-occupancy units for people wanting interim housing. Then we can put in moderately priced restaurants and cafes to serve those people, much like they have in the Seattle area."

Green Valley Road and Main Street have become the hub of the Pajaro Valley's retail center, with four shopping centers built in the last decade.