



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Coffee shop patrons at The Ugly Mug look out onto Soquel Village's main intersection of Soquel Drive and Porter.

Soquel Village braces for traffic tangles, construction chaos during bridge work

Bridges
By **MARINA MALIKOFF**
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The Bargetto Bridge is coming down, and Soquel Village businesses are bracing for the unavoidable traffic nightmares and construction setbacks during the rebuilding.

Merchants, patrons and motorists on Soquel Drive may need nerves of steel.

SOQUEL County planners hope to begin the \$2.3-million project to replace the bridge that arches over Soquel Creek by June and complete the bridge by the end of 2001.

But work on the bridge could spill into 2002 because weather delays and environmental laws restrict access to the creek.

"We can only be in the creek from June until late October," said John Presleigh, assistant director of the county transportation unit.

While the work is under way, traffic across the four-lane bridge will be reduced to one lane in each direction.

"Traffic is going to be a problem," Presleigh said. "We will be putting a lot of signs out there that say 'Use Alternate Route.'"

The existing bridge, built in the 1950s, is being replaced to improve the flow of water and reduce the magnitude of logjams during winter storms. The new bridge will have a 3-foot arch at its peak and thinner pilings. The bulk of the project is being funded with a grant from the state Department of Transportation.

Business owners, who have met with planners three times, appear prepared to suffer the anticipated economic hardships and daily inconveniences for the long-term improvement.

"Will it take away business? Sure it will," said salon owner David Adams. "But my read is that people are happy with (the plan)."

Tom Frankl, owner of Play it Again Sports, is arguably in the toughest spot. His store is in the first building at the base of the bridge.

"It is going to impact us seriously," Frankl said. "We are kind of at the mercy of the county right now. I hope that when it is said and done it makes everything better."

In 1982, raging storm waters tore trees from the river banks. The trees and other debris became trapped under the bridge, forc-

ing the creek to sweep through the village. "We had a logjam the size of a football field," said Tom Burns, the county redevelopment agency director.

While the new bridge won't prevent floods, it is expected to reduce the frequency.

"We're not going to stop all the flooding in Soquel Village," Presleigh said. "But more flow will go underneath the bridge."

At the same time, the county redevelopment agency will begin a planned \$800,000 village beautification project between Main Street and Daubenbiss Avenue.

The plan, scheduled to begin in late spring, includes adding sidewalks to the north side of Soquel Drive, installing trees along the sidewalks, bike lanes and repaving the street.

A right turn lane on to Porter Street will also be added to help ease traffic congestion.

The redevelopment agency has tentatively set a community meeting for Jan. 10. at the Congregational Church of Soquel.

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