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Downtown master plan approved

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SANTA CRUZ — After six years, a master plan for downtown was adopted Tuesday by the City Council.

The Downtown Area Plan becomes the latest addition to the city General Plan.

The council emphasized establishing downtown as a center for the arts, music and museums.

Proposed rezonings on individual parcels will be addressed later as rezonings wind their way through the planning process.

Cedar Street resident Natalie Leavenworth said the plan would botch her dream of starting a business at her house by changing the zoning from commercial to residential.

Council members said they would be willing to consider her problem later.

The DAP covers 250 acres bounded on Beach Hill to the south, San Lorenzo River to the east, Mission Street to the west and Highway 1 to the north.

There are some 3,000 residents in the area and a hodgepodge of homes, businesses and parks.

The council directed the city Downtown

Commission to research whether a lot at the corner of North Pacific Avenue and River Street should be bought by the city for more parking.

Also under consideration will be a traffic assessment district in the North River Street area.

Highlights of the plan:

- Improving traffic circulation in the downtown core to reduce impact on residences and to provide better parking.
- Changing traffic flow on Front Street between Water and River streets to one-way southbound.
- Deleting Chestnut Street as a beach access route, making the street more for residents than tourists.
- Establishing a pilot time-limit parking zone on selected streets.
- Starting a Neighborhood Parking program on Mission Hill.
- Forming high-density residential zones for vacant lots in the North River Street area.
- Using River Street as the gateway to downtown and as a beach access.

Members of the Cultural Council, Historical

Society and Art Museum lobbied for renovation of the former county Front Street jail into a museum or art center, possibly combined with shops.

Assistant County Administrative Officer Pat Busch said the county wants to realize "economic gain" from the former jail building and is willing to cooperate on a cultural project.

The council directed the Planning Commission to recommend programs for implementation of the master plan.

The plan evolved from a series of public hearings. In 1982 the council had appointed a 10-person task force to develop a draft plan.

The task force included downtown residents, business leaders, civic group representatives and planning professionals.

The task force met weekly for six months. Subcommittees were organized to address such topics as parking and traffic.

The draft plan was reviewed by the Downtown Neighbor's Association, Downtown Business Association, the Downtown Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Traffic Committee, Historic Preservation Commission, county Bicycle Committee and other groups.