



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Santa Cruz Planning Director Greg Larson visits the former Lau property with a sketch of the proposed development.

# New life for last quake pit

*Earthquake - City of Santa Cruz - Rebuilding*

By SHANNA MCCORD

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The empty hole on the north end of Pacific Avenue is inching toward a new life with condominiums, a restaurant, new shops and parking garage 17 years after the site was demolished by the Loma Prieta earthquake.

## SANTA CRUZ

The property at 1547 Pacific Ave., owned by Watsonville resident Ron Lau long before the earthquake, was sold for \$1.9 million last year to a local developer. The city pressured Lau to sell or face eminent domain because no plans were in the works and the site had become an eyesore with graffiti and weeds in the heart of downtown.

Developer Bolton Hill will bring a \$25 million proposal to the city Planning Commission on Thursday for recommendation of a design permit that allows the seven-story housing and commercial building to move forward.

Bolton Hill has worked closely with city planners to refine the plans, and Planning Director Greg Larson is recommending the design permit be granted.

The total size of the building would be 135,000 square feet, roughly the same size as the apartment building 1010 Pacific Avenue at the corner of Cathcart Street.

The project represents the final visible chapter in the city's recovery from the 1989 earthquake; construction started in September on the other large remaining Pacific Avenue earthquake hole.

That property, at Church Street, is owned by Louis Rittenhouse and slated to become an office building with retail on the street level.

"We can't understate what a long haul this has been for the community," Norman Schwartz of Bolton Hill said about the plot previously owned by Lau.

Bolton Hill's project is a modern design with varied height, glass walls and angled metal roofs. The building would be unique in that it would span an entire block from Pacific Avenue to Cedar Street, Larson said.

A restaurant with covered outdoor seating and a mezzanine is slated for the ground floor on Pacific Avenue, and two small retail shops would be housed on the Cedar Street ground level, Schwartz said.

Fifty-eight one- and two-bedroom condominiums would be built above the shops for market-rate prices not specified. The parking garage, for residents only, would fit 84 cars. Space for bikes would be available.

Larson said he is impressed with the project's contemporary design, saying the building would be a "signature" establishment likely to bring more activity downtown with homeowners, shop-

pers and diners.

"It's a positive addition to the streetscape," he said. "It will really energize the north end of downtown."

Councilman Mike Rotkin said filling in the hole means new revenue — property and sales taxes — for the city budget.

He's waiting to see details of the final design before granting his wholehearted support. "It will be nice to have our street finished," Rotkin said. "I'm really happy a deal was made and we didn't have to go through with eminent domain."

Lau's lack of rebuilding caused frustration among downtown property owners who saw the site as a liability.

"It's a blank, and we need life and activity on that end of the mall," said Burt Rees, owner of the Lulu Carpenter's building. "The city is losing substantial revenue at a time of a budget crisis because there is no economic activity there. Downtown needs to be infilled."

The City Council has the final authority for granting the project's design permit. The council is expected to be presented with the plans at a public hearing later this month.

If granted the design and building permits, Schwartz said construction could begin next fall and completed in 2009.

Contact Shanna McCord at  
smccord@santacruzsentinel.com.