

# Watsonville buildings in doubt

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WATSONVILLE*

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WATSONVILLE — Officials spent Thursday taking stock of damage caused by the swarm of aftershocks that rocked the Central Coast and much of the San Francisco Bay Area two days ago.

Legal steps will be initiated against two older buildings in downtown Watsonville to either have them torn down or repaired; four Aromas families are without homes, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency has decided to extend its disaster application deadline until May 12.

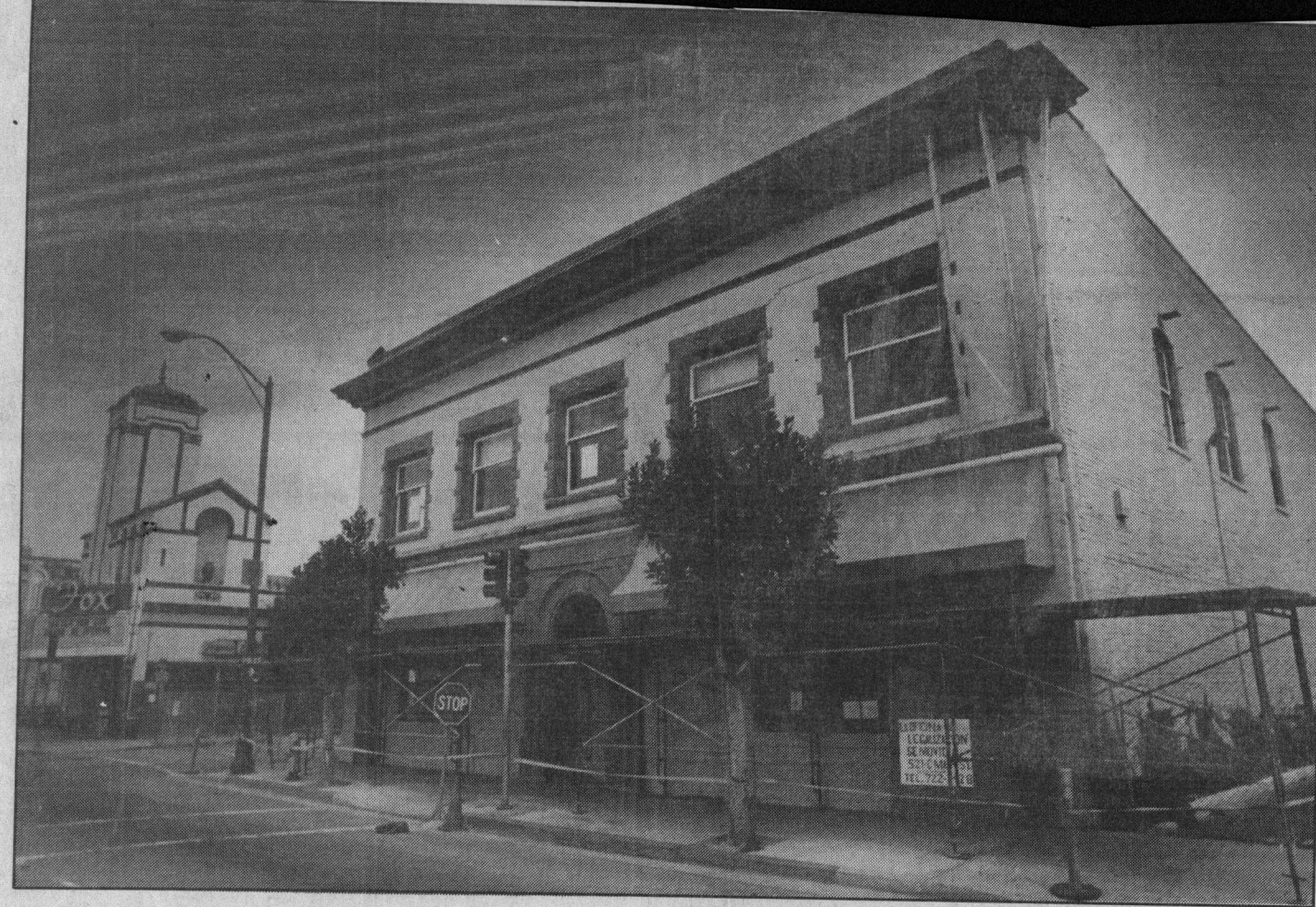
In Watsonville, Chief Building Inspector Neil England decided to put owners of the historic Porter Building at Main and Maple streets on notice that they must either demolish the building or come up with a repair plan. The building suffered more damage in the 13 aftershocks.

An engineer hired by the city is concerned that the brick exterior wall of the Porter Building is unsafe and has recommended it be removed, according to City Clerk Lorraine Washington.

"The city will start abatement proceedings (today) to take the veneer off the building. If the owners want to renovate it, they can, but they'll have to come up with a plan by a certain date," Washington said.

The Porter Building was built in 1903 by architect

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Owners of the Porter Building have been put on notice to raze it or fix it.

# Damage/ Watsonville takes stock

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William Weeks, the same architect who designed St. Patrick's Church and several other hallmarks of the Watsonville cityscape. It was the site of the old Post Office and has been placed on a local historic registry.

The Porter Building was retrofitted five years ago to bring it up to earthquake standards. But it suffered major damage in the Oct. 17 earthquake and officials said it appeared to weaken further with this week's aftershocks.

Steve Andrews, of Barry Swenson Builders, part owner of the Porter Building, said he will be in Watsonville today with a structural engineer to make his own assessment.

"In looking at the building Wednesday, I hadn't noticed anything different than six months ago," Andrews said.

England is also considering starting abatement proceedings against the Jepsen Building on the 500 block of Main Street, Washington said. Although the building didn't suffer additional damage Wednesday, several City Council members have asked at council meetings that the building either be repaired or torn down.

In Aromas, which was the epicenter of Wednesday's aftershocks, four homes were condemned, including two mobile homes, said Keith Ann Glass of the San Benito County Office of Emergency Services.

Three additional homes suffered moderate damage.

The major damage occurred in the vicinity of Chittenden Pass and River Oaks, where a rock slide closed Highway 129 for part of Wednesday.

"We think there might be other homes with damage, but the owners haven't reported to us, so we're encouraging people to call us," Glass said. "It's also important for people to call FEMA."

One Aromas family whose home was destroyed has

been moved into a motel at the expense of the American Red Cross, Glass said. Other families have been offered help but have found their own accommodations, she said.

"We'll have to begin thinking about long-term housing for these people," she said. "Maybe we can get them into a FEMA trailer or some other accommodation. We don't know at this point."

Among the hardest hit were Lynn and Roger Dodd, who had just moved into their home last week. They lost their home and a mobile home on their property, Glass said.

"I've been in these homes and it looks just like it did Oct. 17. Things are on the floor and the houses are off their foundations. It really shook over here," Glass said.

In the wake of the recent swarm of aftershocks that rocked the Central Coast Wednesday, FEMA spokesman Bill Villa said the agency had decided to extend its filing deadline to May 12.

FEMA had been planning to stop taking applications Saturday.

"People that have already applied for assistance don't have to re-apply for a new number. They should call us and give us their FEMA number and update their application," Villa said.

Even if people have received FEMA checks, they should use their original FEMA number when requesting more money, Villa said.

Anyone who hasn't yet applied but who suffered damage should also call FEMA for help by May 12, he said.

The phone number for applying for assistance is 1-(800)-462-9029. For information, it's 1-(800)-525-0321.

In the event of more aftershocks after the May 12 deadline, Villa said FEMA would continue to look at disaster applications on a case-by-case basis.