

Weighing in on beach plan



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Some 600 people attended the City Council meeting Tuesday to listen to the pros and cons of the Beach Area Plan.

Hearing on controversial development draws a crowd

Beach Flats

By **DARREL W. COLE**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Booing, standing ovations, people zooming around in cardboard-car cutouts and green “Beach Plan YES” pins were the norm at Tuesday’s City Council meeting, the first of three scheduled to discuss a plan to redevelop the beach area.

About 600 people attended the meeting at the Civic Auditorium to weigh in on one of the most controversial proposals — the Beach and South of Laurel Area Plan — to come before the city in recent history.

“I don’t think since the 1960s have I seen a project as complex and large as this one,” Councilwoman Katherine Beiers said as she looked out into the packed auditorium.

At 10:45 p.m., after presentations on the plan by several city staffers, consultants and Redevel-

“This only guarantees a benefit for business and not a benefit for the public.”

— Gary Patton

opment Agency officials, as well as nearly 90 minutes of public comment, the council was still listening to audience members, with about 60 residents still waiting to speak.

To handle all the comments, the council said in advance that the public hearing would be continued to Thursday at 7 p.m., again at the auditorium. An Oct. 6 meeting is also scheduled.

Two of the earliest speakers elicited some of the strongest reactions from the audience.

“I am against the plan in front of you,” said Gary Patton, a former

“I find it interesting that all of a sudden people are coming out of the woodwork ...”

— Mike Vasquez

county supervisor who earned a long standing ovation. “This will damage and not assist the beach area. This only guarantees a benefit for business and not a benefit for the public.”

But resident Mike Vasquez disagreed, saying the council had a chance to do what none before it could.

“I find it interesting that all of a sudden people are coming out of the woodwork after so many years. I was humored by the eight former mayors who stepped forward (last week) and said we did nothing and now we want you to do nothing,

9/11/98
too. I hope you all have more fortitude than that,” said Vasquez, referring to the eight former Santa Cruz mayors who have come out against the plan last week.

The area proposed for redevelopment covers 205 acres. One of the most talked-about aspects of the plan, which the city hopes will revitalize the area’s residential and business areas, is the realignment of Third Street, which would take out approximately 25 residential units in the Beach Flats neighborhood; the plan calls for the units to be replaced by another 30 to 36 affordable housing units. The plan also includes the renovation of the historic La Bahia apartment building into a 250- to 275-room conference hotel; a 125,000-square-foot retail complex at the Main Beach lot; a 1.4-acre Boardwalk expansion, which could mean more amusement

Please see BEACH PLAN — BACK PAGE

ch plan

Continued from Page A1

...; a community center and community garden in Beach Flats; and a public/performing arts center and natural history museum in the beach area.

About 30 minutes before Tuesday's meeting, the steps outside the auditorium were bustling with activity and activism. Large signs adorned the front of the building, proclaiming "No Boardwalk Expansion" and "Stop Gridlock — Fight the Beach Plan." Opponents protesting the traffic increase the plan would bring walked slowly around in cardboard-car cutouts, bumping into people to mimic traffic congestion.

The Beach Area Working Group distributed fliers against the plan. In addition, the three November council candidates endorsed by the Santa Cruz Action Network — Tim Fitzmaurice, Keith Sugar and Christopher Krohn — handed out pins and voiced their opposition to the plan.

Phillip Baer, president of the Beach Flats Neighborhood Association, said the plan would make the city's most dense residential area even more so.

"If this were your neighborhood, you wouldn't even dare propose this," he said, shaking his finger at the council. "You wouldn't do this anywhere else but Beach Flats."

According to city officials, Beach Flats has one of the highest crime rates in the city. The nine-acre neighborhood is where 19 percent of all felony arrests in the city occur.

Michael Schmidt, chief executive officer of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, said 93 percent of the chambers' 750 members support

What they had to say: Comments from the meeting

"Renewal or Removal?" proclaimed a sign held by one of 12 Beach Flats residents who picketed outside the auditorium before the start of Tuesday's hearing.

"If this plan is approved as it is, each individual proposal will have to go through the normal review process like any project, similar to what occurred in the downtown area" after the earthquake, said Eileen Fogarty, Santa Cruz director of planning.

"I campaigned for most of you on this council and I find it quite ironic now," said Phillip Baer, president of the Beach Flats Neighborhood Association, which opposes the plan.

"I've been impressed at how each step of the way all the input we've given into this plan

has somehow had an effect on it," said Tom Frederick, executive co-director of the Cabrillo Music Festival.

"All the transportation amenities we pushed on the Planning Commission we want done now," said Mary Tustin, a member of the city Planning Commission.

"There are no late-comers in a democracy. Please slow down, recruit, get more input," said resident Jean Brock.

"Could we get the people who brought their bikes in to move them in the back so we don't have our paths blocked if there's an emergency," said Mayor Celia Scott, upon seeing at least a dozen bikers leaning their bikes against the seats inside the auditorium.

the plan.

"I applaud members of the city

council who have the political will to pass this."