

City considers new bridge

By JONDI GUMZ *Bridge*
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

The consensus on the Stockton Bridge is that the city should seek state funds to design a replacement span, but also look at alternatives to preserve this piece of Capitola's history.

CAPITOLA

The bridge, built in 1934 to cross Soquel Creek in Capitola Village, was designated historic by the City Council two years ago. It is one of only two Depression-era projects undertaken in Capitola by the federal Works Progress Administration. The other, a sewer project, no longer exists.

Public Works director John Fantham contends the bridge has done its service but has become outdated because of new bridges upstream, which no longer trap logs carried by the current.

"It's been 20 years since the last big storm," he said. "If we sit and wait, we're taking a risk."

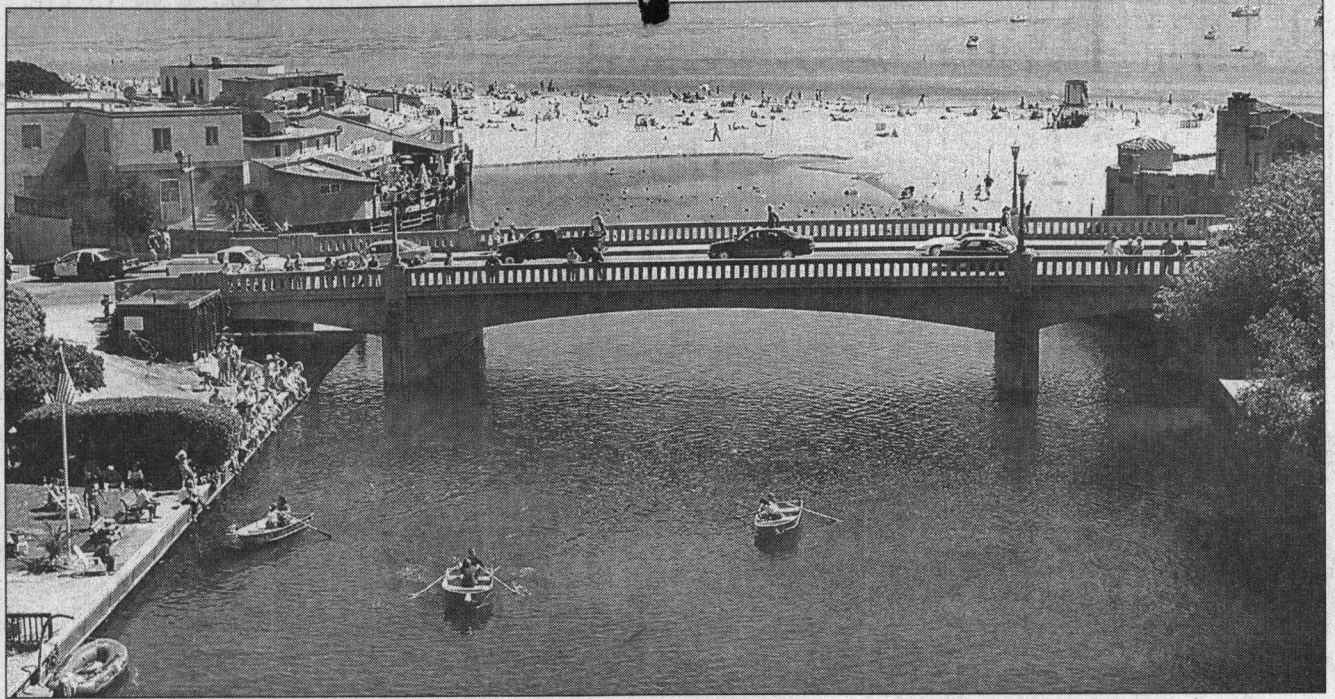
That's because the Stockton Bridge is held up by two supports in the creek, where fallen trees can jam and raise water levels. In heavy rain, the banks of the creek erode and live trees end up in the water along with dead logs.

It used to be that Soquel's two upstream bridges had the same design, which would create log jams in Soquel. Once the Bargetto Bridge is finished in fall 2002, both of them will have an arched design with nothing to hang up the logs, sending them straight to Capitola, where they could cause flooding.

Consultants did an environmental impact report on the new Bargetto bridge, but "they didn't come this far," said Fantham, who was the county public works chief at the time.

City historian Carolyn Swift argued that the village flooded in the past because of high tides, not the creek.

"I did an exhibit on disasters in the city, and I couldn't find one picture of flooding from Soquel Creek in the village," she said.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The city is considering the fate of the historic Stockton Bridge that crosses Soquel Creek in Capitola Village. 9-4-01

The Stockton Bridge, which replaced an iron-and-wooden structure, cost \$25,000 and was significant to Capitola because it was completed in the middle of the Depression.

"Half of Capitola had just burned down, and it was a symbol of new hope at a bleak time in the town's history," Swift said.

A committee of village merchants, residents and officials that heard Fantham's recommendation voted 12-1-1 last week to ask the state for money to come up with a new design. However, the group agreed it would be worthwhile to investigate whether the existing bridge could be modified to reduce the flooding hazard.

"If there are some alternatives, I'd be delighted," said Fantham.

A new bridge could cost \$2 million. Fantham said state money may be available, and the city's share would be about \$400,000.

"It seems like buying insurance," said resident Sandra Wallace, who is on the village committee. "The damages could cost more than a half a million dollars."

Mayor Dennis Norton, whose top priority has been making the village more pedestrian-friendly, abstained from voting. He worried a new bridge would be larger and out of character with Capitola Village, which is a collection of small

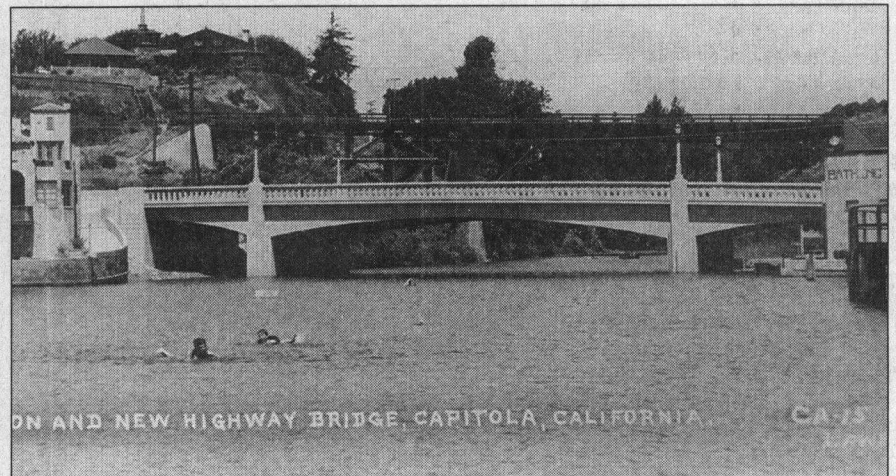


photo courtesy Carolyn Swift

shops and homes. People crossed Soquel Creek in Capitola on a wooden bridge or by taking the trolley before the Stockton Bridge, a concrete structure, was built in 1934.

"I think we should look at every avenue not to replace it," he said.

Committee member Kate Arrieta cast the only no vote. She suggested doing something to catch stray logs.

But Fantham said, "Wherever you put it will be a problem."

Stuart Visionsong, a real estate agent on

the committee, urged city officials to solicit community support for the project.

"The merchants understand the need for it, but for residents to go along, you need to give them a package that explains the situation," he said.

Contact Jondi Gumz at jgumz@santa-cruz.com.