

City Council approves parking plan for more cars, bicycles downtown

SANTA CRUZ — More downtown parking for cars and bicycles are promised in a plan approved Tuesday by the City Council.

It took council members, also acting as the Redevelopment Agency, only 65 seconds to unanimously approve the North Mall Public Improvement Project for 25 acres bounded by Water, River and Cedar Streets and Soquel Avenue.

Their quick decision is believed to be a record-breaker, passing a mark established during the tenure of former Mayor Joe Ghio when council members managed to make a Redevelopment Agency decision in as few as 90 seconds.

The project is designed to make some headway toward solving a parking deficiency calculated this year by planners at 479 spaces.

Traffic from the downtown business district has encroached into neighborhoods to the point planners say "few, if any" park-

ing spaces are available during the day on residential streets within three blocks of the North Mall.

"I don't think you'll ever be able to park all the cars, but this is a step in the right direction," commented Senior City Planner Joe Hall.

By the end of this summer, city officials say more parking spaces will be added on an upper deck at Front/River Street to offset loss of parking spaces from a commercial development now under construction at the foot of Cooper Street.

The improvement project, designed to implement the General Plan, Downtown Area Plan and Parking Master Plan, includes these features:

- Double-decker parking lots at Cedar and Locust Streets, and Front Street and Soquel Avenue.
- More bicycle spaces and better pedestrian walkways and public arts projects.

•Housing rehabilitation and construction, but no changes proposed to affect residents of the St. George or Palomar Hotels on Pacific Avenue.

•Extension of the Pacific Garden Mall onto Soquel Avenue between Pacific and Front Streets.

The 30-year project will be financed through increments in property taxes.

Calculated at today's prices, the costs of parking and other improvements are estimated at \$3.28 million and housing rehabilitation and construction at \$820,000.

Some \$20,000 for the project is anticipated in property tax revenues from the Carl N. Swenson Co. commercial project at the foot of Cooper Street.

The Downtown Commission had reviewed and recommended approval of the project to the council.

The Redevelopment Agency was established after a 1955 flood of the San Lorenzo River to revitalize downtown.