

# Mall vision clouded

## Downtown leader quits planning group

By MARK BERGSTROM  
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SANTA CRUZ — New Downtown Association President Ron Prilliman has resigned from Vision Santa Cruz, charging that the planning group has been ineffective in helping get rebuilding started.

"There has been a 'study it' mentality," Prilliman said Thursday. He is the owner of Cymbaline Records and has been very active in Vision Santa Cruz.

"I don't care about the big picture anymore. I want something to happen. I want buildings in the ground," Prilliman said.

Prilliman said he was not surprised that Ford's Department Store Vice-President Hal Hyde has announced Ford's will rebuild in Watsonville but — at least for the moment — not in Santa Cruz.

Prilliman said there has been no clear vision developed by Vision Santa Cruz, a 36-member mix of business owners, politicians and residents. "After 11 months, everything still is very much up in the air."

What is the holdup downtown? "If city government had gone out and demonstrated a willingness to cooperate, we'd have new buildings by now," Prilliman said.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt disagreed.

"I think we've given clear direction," she said. If there are obstacles that haven't been communicated, she said, property owners should speak up so the city can deal with them.

"But, we can't build their buildings," said Wormhoudt, who is also a member of Vision Santa Cruz.

Vision Santa Cruz has come up with general recommendations which were requested by the City Council and is now looking at more specific issues. Prilliman said he does not know of one property owner who is near breaking ground, except maybe the new owners of the Gottschalks Department Store property.

But Charles "Chop" Keenan said he and partner Jack Bariteau are still at the preliminary stages of putting plans together.



Ron Prilliman and Downtown Association director Pat Calvert. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Please see MALL — A20

## Mall

Continued from Page A1

And although he would only say he and Bariteau have an option to buy the old Pacific Western Building, across the street, the Sentinel learned Thursday that the deal is actually in escrow.

Bookshop Santa Cruz owner and Vision Santa Cruz member Neal Coonerty defended the city Thursday, saying, "From Oct. 17 on, the city's done a tremendous job."

Coonerty said the city has reached out to business owners "in every way."

Coonerty said he is optimistic, saying he plans to double the size of his bookstore when his building is ready. Coonerty does not own that building.

He believes more is going on than meets the eye. "There are many stories out there — owners talking with attorneys and with banks — we just don't know all of them," Coonerty said.

One of those stories involves the Trust Building, the historic red-brick structure at the corner of Pacific and Soquel avenues.

Property manager Ruben Fuentes said Thursday that engineering studies are under way to determine if the building can be saved. "We want to save it," he said.

But the teetering brick walls are posing a bigger-than-expected problem, he said.

Downtown businessman Rod Quartararo said the city has been too distracted with the residential-

**'You don't rebuild retailing by talking about housing.'**

— Ron Prilliman

hotel housing issue and the St. George Hotel to make headway on rebuilding.

Prilliman agreed. "The first six months of Vision Santa Cruz were concerned with housing. You don't rebuild retailing by talking about housing."

He also charged that the city, and now Vision Santa Cruz, is doing too much talking about social problems downtown. "John Laird's group did a wonderful job a year or so ago, they defined all the problems. What we need now is implement a plan," Prilliman said. There are a number of options, ranging from stricter sentences for chronic drunks to leasing the downtown to the merchants so trespassing laws can be enforced.

"If the council would just make the statement 'We're going to do whatever it takes to solve the problem,' you'd have people lining up to do their developments."