

# Bold beach-area vision



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The plan would see 18 housing units on Park Place and Third Street, including those shown above, demolished and replaced elsewhere.

## Boardwalk expansion, traffic changes, housing key

By MARTHA SNYDER  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — City officials are working with the Seaside Co. on a \$3.3 million plan to expand the Boardwalk amusement park, demolish 18 existing housing units and improve the traffic flow around the Beach Flats neighborhood.

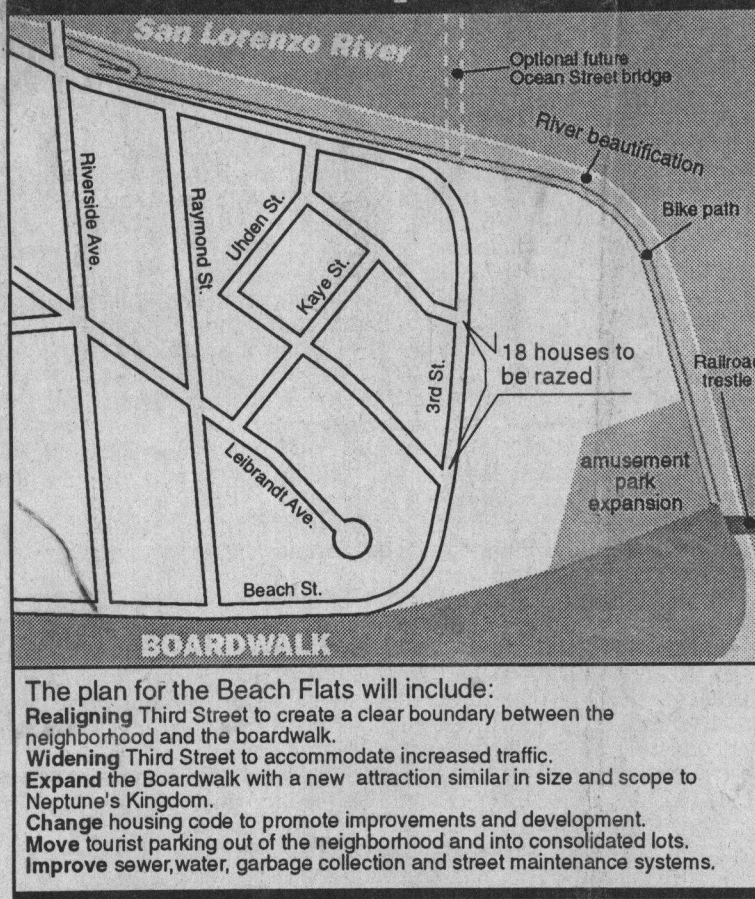
"This is a comprehensive, long-term plan which involves housing, neighborhood improvement, traffic circulation and commercial expansion in the area," Santa Cruz Principal Planner Kathy Barbaro said.

Acknowledging that the proposals are going to garner a great deal of reaction, Barbaro is quick to caution that plans are preliminary and many public hearings will be held before final decisions are made.

The Beach Flats Specific Plan, which will be released to the public Friday, is intended to convey a sense of the community's vision for the area up to and beyond the year 2000. The plan includes an overview of the generally bleak conditions in the so-called Beach Flats area, followed by an optimistic statement outlining how the community can reflect a "successful dynamic" between a diverse, quality residential neighborhood and a major year-round recreational facility.

Councilwoman Jane Yokoyama, who chairs the City Council's Beach Area Subcommittee, says the Beach Flats will be "a model community" with quality housing and good amenities.

### Beach flats plan



Chris Carothers/Sentinel

'My feeling is that the Boardwalk needs to succeed. ... They are in a competitive world and they need to attract new customers.'

— Mayor Don Lane

'They're nuts. They don't need that Boardwalk any wider than it is. They've got enough crap over there already.'

— Ann Burkett,  
Beach Flats resident

### Boardwalk expansion

Seaside Co. officials say that to maintain their share of Northern California's tourism market, they need major new developments from time to time "to entice our guests to see us in a new light and to foster repeat visitation."

Ted Whiting, Seaside Co. vice president of general services, said the 90,000-square-foot expansion could increase revenues by as much as 15 percent, which would bring an additional \$270,000 to the city's general fund through admission, parking and transient oc-

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# Beach Flats plan calls for bold changes

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cupancy taxes.

Seaside officials envision some type of new ride or center comparable in size and scope to Neptune's Kingdom, which opened last year. Planners say any new attraction should be year-round so as to increase off-season business.

Barbaro said the city sees the expansion as a bagging chip. Preliminary plans call for the Seaside Co. to pay 75 percent of the cost of the project, which would provide significant public improvements for the community as well as the Boardwalk expansion.

"It's not a freebie," Whiting agreed. "We're going to gain and we expect to participate."

Mayor Don Lane says he is willing to support development if the city will be getting a good deal.

"My feeling is that the Boardwalk needs to succeed," Lane said. "I'm aware they are in a competitive world and they need to attract new customers."

City planners say Seaside Co. has not filed any applications with the city for an amusement park expansion at this point, but that conceptual approval is needed in the near future so they continue to work on the overall plan.

Whiting and Barbaro agreed the new attraction probably would not open for at least 10 years.

## Neighborhood problems

A city study of the Beach Flats area found that 1,200 people live in about nine developed acres, which means there are more people living in less space than anywhere else in Santa Cruz.

Serious criminal activity including drug traffic, robberies, assaults and prostitution have increased dramatically in the Beach Flats in recent years. Police say that about 20 percent of their service calls are in the area, although only four percent of Santa Cruz' residents live there.

Fire Department officials say narrow streets, high building density and summer traffic make access almost impossible at times, and the Water Department says deteriorated pipes make Beach Flats one of the worst areas in Santa Cruz. The Public Works Department says the neighborhood suffers from cracking curbs, gutters and sidewalks, weak lighting, not enough parks and lots of litter.

Barbaro says the city hopes to address all of these problems with additional services and improved facilities, some of which would be paid for by Seaside Co. as part of the expansion.

In addition, the Planning Department is asking that builders be allowed to increase density standards from 27 units per acre to 35 units per acre, which is actually typical in the neighborhood. The plan includes are proposed incentives and some requirements for developers to create low-income housing, and about 100 new units could be created.

## Proposed road changes

Proposed road changes in the Beach Flats may prove to be the most controversial of the entire plan, because widening Third Street and rerouting traffic will require the demolition of 18 housing units and put a busy road close to other people's front doors. Santa Cruz officials contracted with San Jose based-Wilbur Smith Associates to create the traffic plan, which was designed to relieve congestion within the Beach Flats neighborhood and route tourists in a wide loop around the neighborhood.

## Corrections and clarifications

It is the policy of the Sentinel to correct factual errors. We encourage readers to call our City Desk if they are aware of such errors. Please phone 423-4242.

The plan calls for a new road adjacent to the San Lorenzo River to replace Third Street, which planners say is curvy, narrow and dangerous. There is room for a future Ocean Street Bridge across the river, although that is not definitely planned at this point.

Third Street would also be expanded, which would require the demolition of 18 units along Third Street and Park Place near the Boardwalk.

The plan calls for the housing to be replaced elsewhere, and proponents say the new units will be nicer than the ones slated for demolition.

Lane says he will not go ahead with any plan unless it has "an ironclad guarantee that the units are not just going to be replaced, but that they actually are going to be enhanced. Otherwise, I'm not going to let that housing go."

The traffic plan emphasizes reducing the number of cars in the neighborhood with shuttles, the railroad line between Santa Cruz and Roaring Camp in Felton, bike lanes and better walking areas. A bicycle/shuttle lane would run through the area, and special shuttles including double-decker buses and motorized cable cars are being considered. Planners also hope to improve the bike crossing on the railroad trestle bridge, which would tie in to existing bike lanes on Riverside and West Cliff Drive.

Finally, on-street parking would be moved, possibly near a proposed Laurel Street factory outlet as well as in multi-story lots near the Boardwalk. Planners say buses could shuttle visitors between the two centers, enhancing business at both locations.

## Residents raise doubts

"I think they're out of their cotton-pickin' minds," Beach Flats resident Ann Burkett said when asked about the project.

Burkett manages five units at 120 Park Place, which lies in the proposed path of the realigned Third Street. She said she has lived at that complex for 16 years, and that she has seen her neighbors bought out and knocked down by Seaside Co.

"I think they're nuts," she said. "They don't need that Boardwalk any wider than it is. They've got enough crap over there already."

Burkett predicted a fight if the plan is adopted. She said her building's owner, Los Angeles resident Jill Vanderburg, has already rejected several offers from

Seaside Co. to buy her property.

"You want to know what I think," Burkett said. "I know darned, darned well they can't build a road through my house."

Beach Flats resident Phil Baer also opposes the traffic rerouting and Boardwalk expansion, which he says will further deteriorate the neighborhood. Baer says "fighting the Boardwalk is like fighting Goliath," but even so he plans to object to the plan when it comes before the City Council.

Baer says the proposal, which was designed after community meetings about three alternative plans, does not reflect the needs or interests of the Beach Flats community.

"The so-called preferred alternative will have Third Street run through 18 housing units and shoves the road up against about 100 other homes. This is downright intolerable," Baer said. "It cuts the neighborhood in half."

Don Fong of the bicycle advocacy organization, Pedal Power, said the plan doesn't go far enough in providing for cyclists.

"Hills, the San Lorenzo River, one-way streets, heavy motorized traffic and gaps in existing bike lanes all make the Beach area a cyclist's nightmare," Fong said. "This plan does not address those issues."

The San Lorenzo River Restoration Committee fears fumes, noise and light from a road parallel to the river could endanger vegetation, birds and fish.

But Redevelopment Agency Director Ceil Cirillo says the plan will be good for the economy of the city, because tax revenues will increase.

As for the Beach Flats residents, Cirillo says "I don't think the plan is bad for the neighborhood."

"Any street improvement that lessens the impact of the traffic in the neighborhood is a good improvement," she said.

## A floodplain and how it grew

Local historian Ross Eric Gibson says that in the early 1800s the Beach Flats was a rural, largely undeveloped floodplain that butted up to the San Lorenzo River on two sides and an expansive beach on another.

The area developed into a ship-building region called Schooner Flats, and later into a tourist vacation spot with bungalows, bathhouses and campgrounds.

The Boardwalk opened in 1904, but plans to put an aquarium, gardens and parks in the rest of the area fell through, and more inexpensive weekend cottages were built instead.

Today some of those cottages not destroyed in the 1955 floods or the 1989 earthquake still stand, although more of the housing is newer as an influx of low-income Latino residents moved into the area.

Nancy Hendee, who represents the Seaside Co. and other major property and business owners in the area, says the business community of Santa Cruz has been trying to consolidate land and spawn economic growth in the Beach Flats since the 1950s.

Specific plans to revitalize the Beach Flats area began in the mid-1980s, when Seaside Co. officials were considering building a tourist hotel at the site of the La Bahia apartment complex, and the Santa Cruz Community Housing Corp. was planning a housing project.

Tumultuous changes in the City Council and the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake put plans on hold, and when the city was ready to work on the issue again, there were new problems and different interests.

Seaside Co. spokeswoman Ann Parker says the company still has "potential interest way down the road" in developing a conference center and hotel, but that there is no active interest at this point.

## The next step

In early May the Planning Commission will be asked to approve the housing code changes and to give conceptual approval to the overall plan.

The proposal then will be brought before the City Council for the same approvals and direction, giving planners the go-ahead to open a new round of public hearings, refine the routes and begin environmental and financial studies.

Lane says he is "pretty close to being ready to at least give conceptual approval to a lot of the aspects of it."

Yokoyama says she is anxious to hear the opinions of Beach Flats residents.

"It can't just be the city going in to make things better," she said. "The community is going to have to be part of the process."

## On the street

### Should Jerry Brown be taken seriously?

(Asked at Seabright Plaza in Santa Cruz)



**Mark Vandenberg**  
Merchant marine,  
Santa Cruz

Yes, I think he should be. I take him seriously, although I don't have confidence that other people will. We need to take people like Brown, who have untraditional views of politics, more seriously.



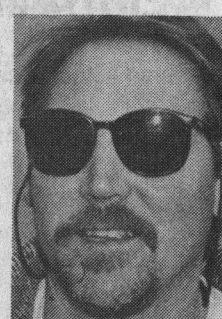
**Don Vicki**  
Retired, Santa Cruz

No. When he was governor, he put thousands of people out of work when he froze all freeway construction. The bridge interchange at 280, 680 and 101, left unfinished for years, was termed the Jerry Brown Memorial Bridge because it went nowhere.



**Birgit Wilke**  
Teacher, Aptos

Yes he should be taken seriously. He's a man for the working-class people. He's truly interested in the citizens, although he doesn't have the support that he should. I think he's an excellent candidate.



**John Lake**  
Sales, Santa Cruz

Yes. I take him seriously. He's offering a message that people want to hear. He's saying the system isn't working, that it needs an overhaul and a lot of people agree with him. I don't know if he can change it, but he can't do any harm.



**Martin Cervantes**  
Waiter, Santa Cruz

I don't really know a lot about Jerry Brown, but I don't think he has a chance of becoming the president. I think Bush will be re-elected because people know who he is.