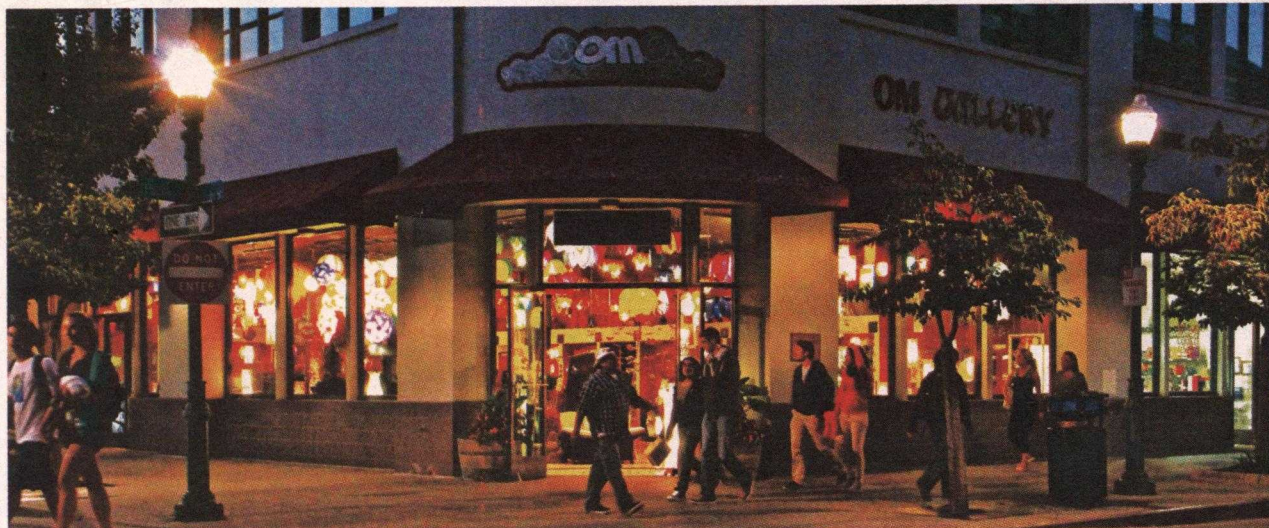
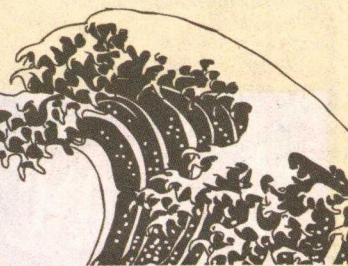


Currents



PACIFIC NOTIONS Differing proposals for downtown set apart the Santa Cruz City Council candidates' visions.

Showdown on Main Street

City Council candidates offer competing visions for downtown Santa Cruz **BY JACOB PIERCE**

A YEAR AGO, retail expert Bob Gibbs came to Santa Cruz and finished an economic development study. According to his analysis, making Pacific Avenue a two-way street would boost sales 30 percent and bring in new businesses to fill vacancies downtown. This year, the controversial two-way Pacific Avenue concept is still on the table, and the plan might not see a council vote until after the election. And that's not the only downtown issue at the heart of the City Council race. In the course of sitting down with all eight of the candidates, a recurring theme began to emerge: many are offering compelling and sometimes battling visions for how Santa Cruz's downtown could be redefined and made even more vibrant,

more fun and hopefully friendlier for families and businesses.

The main ideas break down like this:

New Directions: There is a backup alternative to two-way traffic on Pacific. Mayor Don Lane and candidate CeCe Pinheiro are supporting one-way southbound traffic on the street. This separate plan had three benefits and five drawbacks, according to civil engineer Chris Schneider, whereas two-way was ranked with four benefits and 12 drawbacks. The one-way plan would send traffic in one direction from Mission Street to Cathcart, where it would continue two ways. Unfortunately, the one-way option would not send many beachgoers downtown. But the two-way option would eliminate 42 parking spots and doesn't exactly have a blessing of Santa

Cruz Fire Department officials, who are worried about squeezing their ladder trucks past opposing traffic.

Foot Traffic: Three candidates are pushing to give the Pacific a pedestrian mall a shot—something city economic development staff is hesitant to try. Three candidates—carpenter Jake Fusari, community volunteer Steve Pleich and activist Micah Posner—would like to see how a car-free Pacific would look, or at least see further study for the idea.

Retail expert Gibbs says pedestrian malls need 1 million square feet to be successful; Santa Cruz has well under half that. Then there's the issue of parking revenues, which would likely decline. Posner, who wants to see a pedestrian mall trial run, doesn't think parking meters' nickels and dimes should dictate public policy. "We can

simply try it," Posner says. "We should just close a section or two on Sundays, the first Friday of the month or every Friday and count commercial receipts and bodies and see what works out."

Fee Free: In an effort to address vacant storefronts downtown, Richelle Noroyan floated the idea of relaxing traffic impact fees to bring in more businesses. "It's one of those tradeoffs," Noroyan says of the current fee. "We might be collecting the fee, but are we killing a business that could come in here and be here for a long time?" Pamela Comstock, co-founder of Take Back Santa Cruz, thinks the council should create a business advisory group with representatives from the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Association and the Downtown Commission. She hopes that would allow businesses to keep the city in the loop about their needs.

Academic Assistance: Blaming UC-Santa Cruz for traffic, loud parties and water shortages is something of a local tradition. But several candidates would like Santa Cruz to strengthen its bridge to the city on a hill. CeCe Pinheiro, for example, wants UCSC to host the Human Genome Research Institute, in hopes it would bring big events to the Museum of Art and History and the yet-unfinished Santa Cruz Warriors stadium. Richelle Noroyan would like to see Santa Cruz retain more UCSC grads from prestigious majors like computer game design. She hopes they open up businesses at downtown co-working complexes like Cruioworks.

Get a Little Closer: Steve Pleich is running on the slogan "It's about access." Apparently, he's not kidding. If elected, Pleich says he'll spend his salary renting an office downtown to hold open office hours. That way, he says, people could "come in to talk to their councilmember anytime they want about all the things that concern them." Couldn't people just walk two blocks to City Hall to talk to their councilmembers? Sure, says Pleich, but he thinks his personal office might seem less daunting than Santa Cruz headquarters. ☺