

Merchants OK plan for trees

More trees approved for mall

By KAREN CLARK
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The case of the controversial tree-spacing was buried Wednesday when downtown property owners told the Streetscape Committee one tree every 25 feet was OK by them.

"We feel that it's a very good program for the downtown, and we would like to support it," said Leonard McVicar, member of the Property Owners Committee of the Downtown Association.

The committee voted unanimously Tuesday night to support the plan to plant trees every 25 feet along rebuilt Pacific Avenue.

Streetscape Committee members had been told just two weeks ago by businessman Bob Thomas that the decision to narrow the spacing from 50 feet would not sit well with property owners.

But Jim Lang, director of the city Parks and Recreation Department, soothed concerns Tuesday night when he told property owners the trees would be carefully maintained to prevent overgrowth and the subsequent deep shade.

"When it was first presented, there was a lot of concern," said McVicar before the Streetscape Committee meeting. "But with the additional information, we have no problem with it."

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— Leonard McVicar,
property owners' group

The Idaho locust tree, however, didn't stand up as well to scrutiny.

Consultant Boris Dramov of ROMA Design Group said the locust that was to be planted along one side of Pacific turned out to be "too fragile" and tended "not to want to grow up."

As a result, consultants successfully lobbied the Streetscape Committee to recommend jacaranda, a more robust flowering tree.

The tree, which blooms with purple, pink or white flowers for a little more than a month each year, will line the west side of Pacific from Cathcart Street north.

London plane trees will be planted along the other side of Pacific.

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With proper trimming, it will provide a wide branching, but will let lacy sunlight through to the sidewalk and storefronts.

That's a key concern of property owners and storekeepers. Consultants have promised to provide a maintenance manual to the city that covers tree-trimming.

When the trees are first planted, they will be 20 feet high, and the lowest branches will be at least eight feet above the ground, preferably 10 feet, said consultants.

Within five years, said Dramov, the lowest branches will be at 14 feet. That's in keeping with the 14-foot-6-inch street lights that will line Pacific every 50 feet.

Merchants want enough light from these old-fashioned street fixtures to ensure an inviting retail atmosphere into the evening.

How Pacific Avenue will be planted from Cathcart south to Laurel Street still is undecided.

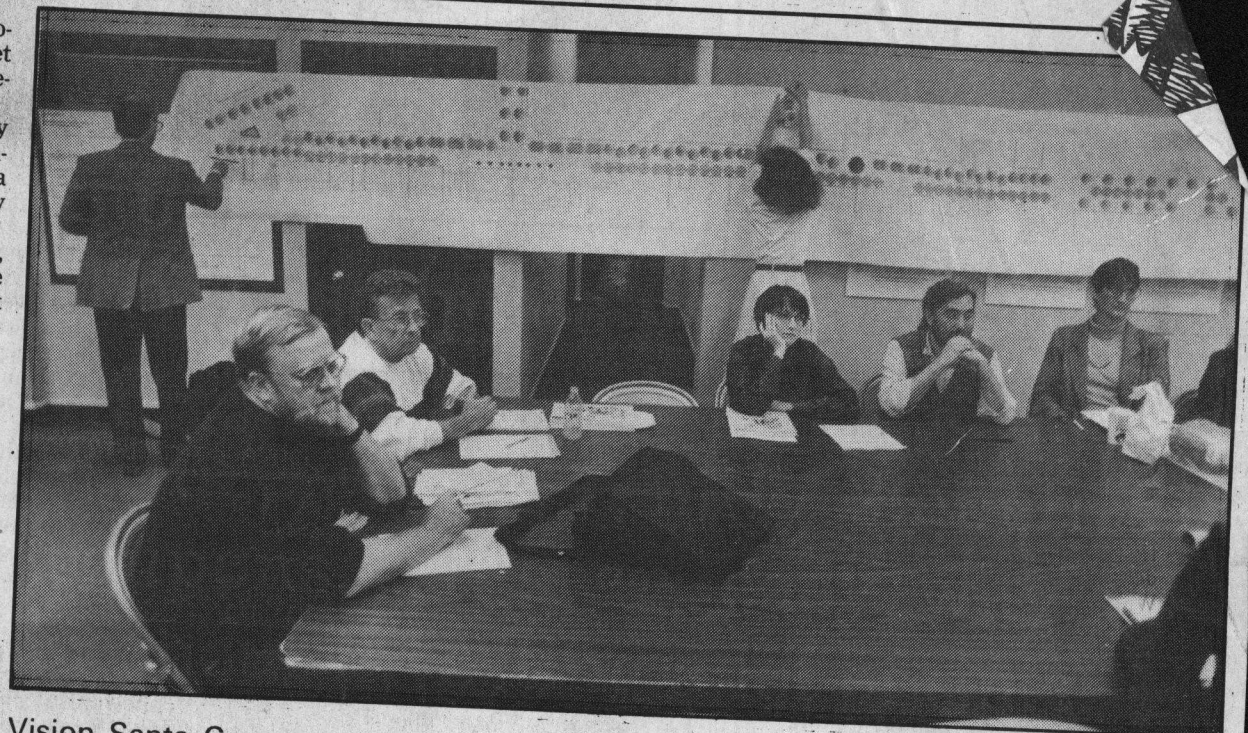
Consultants asked for jacaranda trees along the median strip, with London plane trees on the two sides.

But committee members asked that more work be done on finding a different tree for the median. The red horse chestnut suggested two weeks ago proved to be lacking after consultants studied it further.

An alternative suggestion was planting the median with sycamore trees, with jacarandas on both sides.

Another variation in the plan is to have jacarandas line both sides of Cooper Street, flowing around the corners to Pacific.

Across the street, along the pro-



Vision Santa Cruz meets as a consultant displays plan for Pacific Avenue trees.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

posed cinema/billiards room/retail space project on the old Gottschalks site, will be a line of palm trees.

This was a controversial subject Wednesday, with some committee members wondering if palm trees really "said" downtown Santa Cruz.

But consultants said the sidewalk was at its narrowest in front of that project, and full size trees wouldn't work.

"My feeling is Santa Cruz is not a palm tree community," said com-

mittee member Brandon Cornell.

But member Susan Gibbs called the palm trees "a wonderful break from the rest of the streetscape. ... This is a beach town and we want to get people going to the beach to feel at home in downtown Santa Cruz."

Members also addressed what to do with the war memorial at the head of Pacific. It most likely will be moved into the small garden area at the point, but officials will be talking with veterans' groups first.

What all this is going to cost also

was outlined Wednesday.

A portion of proceeds from Measure E, the earthquake-recovery take, has been earmarked for the \$4.2 million project.

Current budget projections call for \$1.69 million for paving and curbs, \$554,075 for planting and irrigation, \$575,200 for street furniture, \$123,312 for temporary barriers and site grading, \$353,000 for electrical systems, \$329,308 for the general contractor, and \$521,624 in design and general contingency funds.