

Beach Flats

# Beach Area Plan

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## Redevelopment plan gets final council hearing

by Kim Monari Jeannette

**F**EW LOCAL CIVIC proposals have generated more planning, more input, more paper or more passion in recent years than the city of Santa Cruz Beach and South of Laurel Comprehensive Area Plan.

The acronym is B/SOL, or BSL. Some detractors use only the first two letters for a shorter acronym that they feel suits their purposes. And the sheer bulk of the plan itself has generated a proliferation of publications both for and against it. Tuesday and Sept. 17, the Santa Cruz City Council will hold public hearings on the final version of the BSL and the Certification of the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

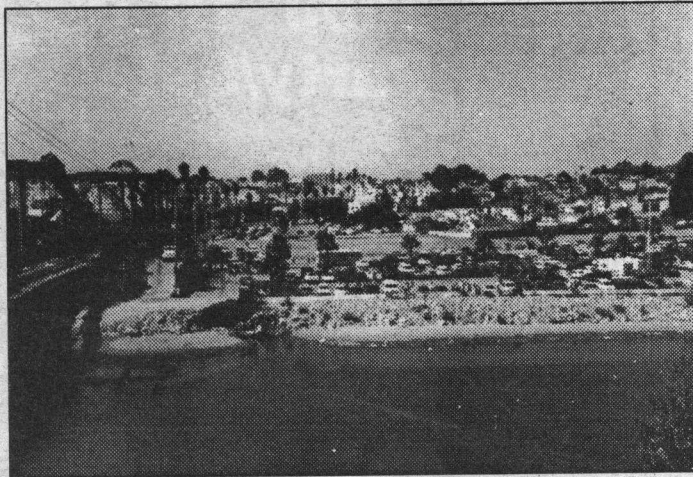
### Quake inspired

The first new group of city members elected after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake was a diverse group, but they were united in their resolve that the reconstruction of the quake-ravaged city should designate the Beach Flats area as a high priority.

The plan was authored for the city by consultant Frances Phipps, who helped create a plan for her own Takoma Park, MD, neighborhood. It's an area that is said to have once resembled the current Beach Flats neighborhood.

Santa Cruz Planning and Community Development Director Eileen Fogarty introduced the plan saying that it represents the culmination of seven years of intensive analysis and continuing community outreach, involving more than 1800 individuals, 20 organizations and participation by city, county and regional agencies, boards and commissions. She says the process began with the work of the Santa Cruz City Council and the Beach Area Advisory Committee in 1991-1992.

In her own words, Phipps describes the innovations this way: "Imagine a shuttle on Pacific Avenue taking you down through



**The Beach and South of Laurel Comprehensive Area Plan proposes a vast redevelopment of the city's most visible neighborhood.**

the newly installed traffic circle at the wharf and dropping you off for a stroll down the Beach Promenade to the ocean view restaurant at the historic La Bahia Conference Hotel. Music rises from the weekly Wednesday concerts on the Promenade. New buildings line Beach Street. They reflect the historic Santa Cruz ocean resort styles of the turn of the century."

The original proposal included three phases, broken out roughly into three five-year increments. After the public comment period for the draft versions of the BSL and EIR ended, the Planning and Community Development department and the Redevelopment Agency identified a modified plan, called "the Reduced Commercial Alternative."

It sought to eliminate Phase III of Boardwalk expansion of an additional 1.6 acres. It also called for the elimination of the marine interpretive center on the River Lot as well as a River Lot Garage. The Reduced Plan also cut retail space from 225,000 square feet to a total of 125,000 square feet.

The plan would include:

- Realignment of Third Street, including 19 affordable housing units.

- Tough enforcement of existing health and safety codes to encourage landlord improvements to current housing.

- Streetscaping to buffer and insulate residential areas from commercial areas.

- Development of programs to encourage home ownership in Beach Flats (current ownership is less than 1 percent).

- Boardwalk expansion (1.4 acres) and construction of 125 foot roller coaster

- Construction of 275 room hotel.

- Development of 125,000 square feet of commercial space.

- Consolidation of parking to riverfront and enhancement with picnic areas.

- Construction of museum/marine interpretive center.

- Completion of a Beach Street Promenade, retail development of Pacific Avenue from Laurel to Beach Street.

- Shuttle system integrated with satellite parking lots.

- Traffic circles at Center and Pacific streets, and Beach and Pacific streets.

- Reinsituting Weekend Rail connection between Santa Cruz and the Bay Area and commuter rail service between UCSC and Watsonville.

- Two-way bikeway on Beach and Third streets.

### Planning for opportunity

City Planning Director Fogarty says in a January memo, "as the city of Santa Cruz approaches the 21 century, it has the opportunity to mold its future in the Beach and South of Laurel. Having successfully rebuilt the downtown after the devastating Loma Prieta earthquake, the city is poised for the physical renaissance of this major residential and recreational sector... The plan lays out a challenging agenda for the city to build on its heritage and its other strengths as it leaves one century and enters the next — growing ever more vibrant and ever more committed to the well-being of its citizens."

Given the eclectic nature of the Santa Cruz citizenry, "challenging" is a fitting description of the agenda at hand.