

# Plot prep



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Nearly 10 years after the Loma Prieta quake required the demolition of the building at this parcel at Pacific Avenue and Church Street in downtown Santa Cruz, the owners of the parcel have begun preparing the land for building again.

## Work now under way on parcel some had sought as site of downtown plaza

By **DARREL W. COLE**  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Some earth was moved downtown Thursday when the long-vacant lot at Pacific Avenue and Church Street was cleaned up and cleared out.

The site preparation signals the beginning of what the property owners hope will be a unique commercial/retail development on the 20,000-square-foot parcel. Former City Councilman Louis Rittenhouse, whose family owns the lot, said Thursday he expects to present a development plan to the city Planning Department in October.

Rittenhouse's plans clash with a move to turn the plot into a downtown plaza.

The parcel is the largest downtown property left undeveloped since the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Before the quake, it was home to the Body Options clothing store and other businesses. On Thursday, a backhoe dug out con-

crete chunks left from the original foundation, cleared weeds and leveled dirt. Broken concrete chunks were put in one area, while what looked like clothes and sleeping materials were put in a pile. Several cat food dishes remained untouched in the corner of the property off Church.

All during the day, passers-by stopped, looked between the cracks of the tall fence and moved on. Others glanced over as they walked by.

"There is ground there," said one passer-by, referring to the high weeds that had dominated the site.

Rittenhouse refused to provide details of his plans, but said he hoped they would outdo his Flatiron Building at Pacific and Front Street. The odd-shaped Flatiron building was completed in 1998 and houses Jamba Juice and Network Alchemy. Before starting development of the Pacific and Church site, Rittenhouse said he wanted to finish his work at the Flatiron Building.

He said his project will be suitable for the site, as envisioned in the Downtown Recovery Plan. After site preparation is complete, Rittenhouse said he will take soil samples before submitting plans for review.

The preliminary work seems to be another setback for a group pushing for a new downtown plaza. They have urged the city to condemn the Rittenhouse property, acquire it, and build a public plaza on the site.

Four City Council members would like the site as a plaza, but five votes are needed before the city can force an unwilling seller to sell.

Rittenhouse has said he won't sell the property because it has "great historic significance" to his family.

Rittenhouse's grandfather, Emmet, was the original owner of the building and was murdered there in 1948.