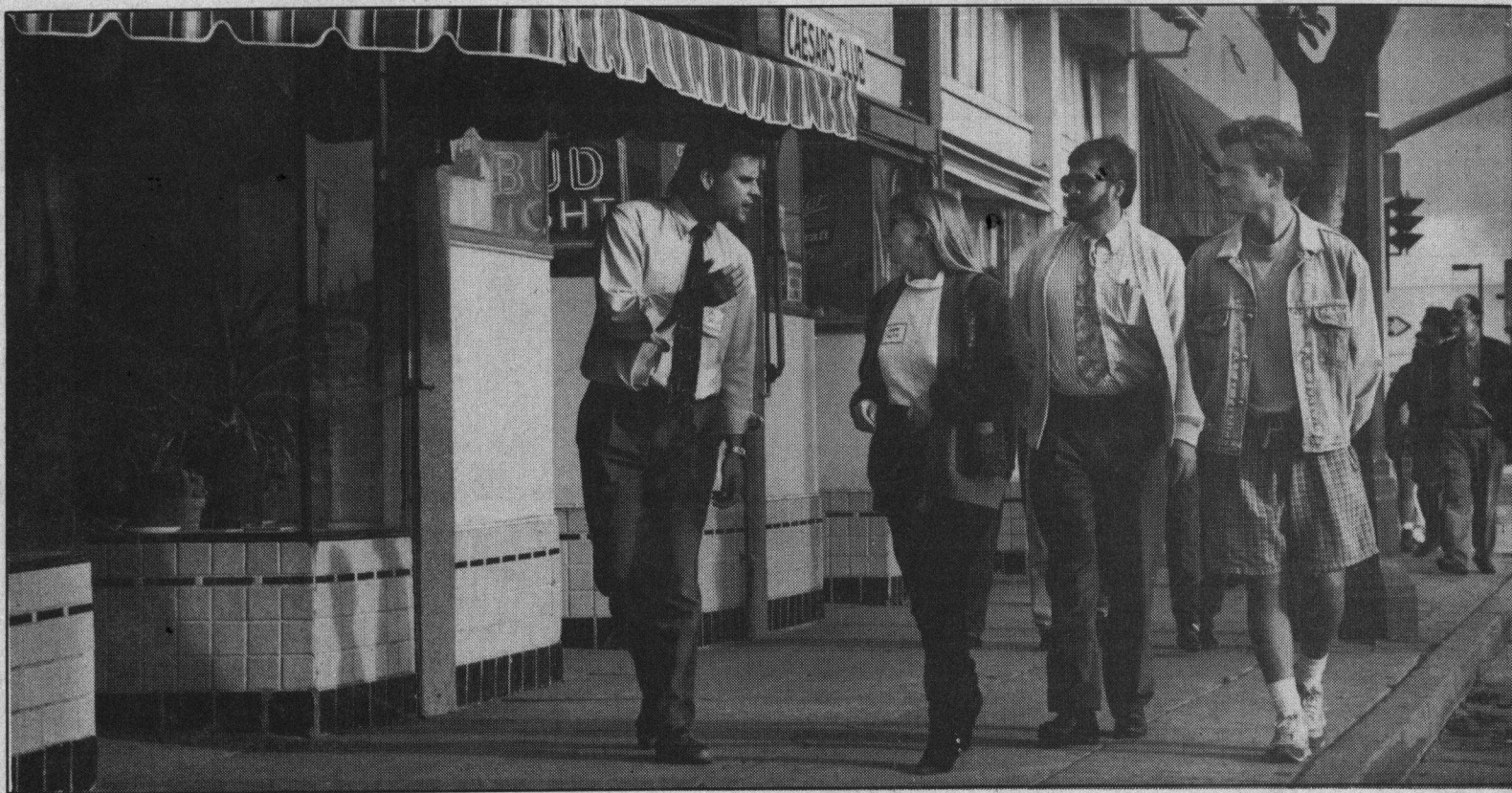


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Kurt Ellison

Architect Paul Davis, left, leads team members up the 200 block of Main Street during a downtown tour. Davis was one of four team leaders and is a past president of the Monterey Bay Area Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

# Experts critique downtown

## Architects say city has problems, but lots of potential

By JUDY BRILL  
STAFF WRITER

Like an aging actress being prepared for a close-up, the face of Watsonville's downtown was the subject of intense scrutiny and discussion by a team of architects this weekend.

The outcome of the professional collaboration, organized by the Main Street Watsonville program and conducted at no cost by area architects, was that the old lady has got some good bones and there's something to work with, but there's much to be done if she's going to be beautiful.

So said five teams of structural and landscape architects in an evening of presentations Saturday at City Hall.

Using a "before and after" format of architectural sketches, the teams moved address by address down Watsonville's main thoroughfare, pinpointing both the good and bad features they found along the way.

The extent of the problems and recommendations varied from simply adding new paint and changing signs to re-exposing hidden transoms, redesigning entrances and adding new roofs. How the renovations will be paid for has yet to be addressed. No specific assessments have been made, but general costs for the proposed renovations range from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

A draft Facade Improvement Program that would provide low-cost loans to property owners to act on the recommendations has not been released. Jerry Hernandez, executive director of the Main Street Watsonville program, said a presentation will be made to the City Council outlining the architects' findings.

The most easily remedied problems offered by the architects were those in which a structure's attributes are being covered up, either by dark awnings, old paint or overgrown

trees.

One such case is the Lettunich building, at 496 Main St. Listed as a historic building on the National Register, the structure suffers from a hodgepodge of unattractive signage and clunky trees, Watsonville landscape architect Doug Aithen told the 30 or so people in the audience.

Aithen presented a revised version of the building — minus a large magnolia tree that now hides an attractive archway currently being renovated, and with the building's three stores marked by uniform signs.

Aithen noted that over the years, the sidewalk in front of the Lettunich had narrowed. "You can't enjoy the building when you're up close," he said, and suggested taking out a couple of parking spots on the Beach Street side and expanding the sidewalk to create a "Parisian cafe" type of area.

A few doors down at the old Harris building, 450 Main, archi-

tect Salvador Munoz said the top half of the building had been well preserved but that the bottom half had been "massacred."

He likened the building to a photo album that children had gotten hold of. His team proposed restoring planters that appeared in early photographs of the building, and continuing the plants at two lower sets of windows. A former roof mantle should also be replaced, he said.

The team found the back of this building was "in a chaotic state," complete with a dilapidated staircase. Munoz described a transformation into a landscaped courtyard and arcade where people could bring brown-bag lunches. It could "bring something softer to a harsh sea of asphalt," he said.

Similar recommendations were made for City Hall, which was described as "a little bit institutional." The city's earthquake monument in front of City Hall got many comments and mixed reviews from the teams.