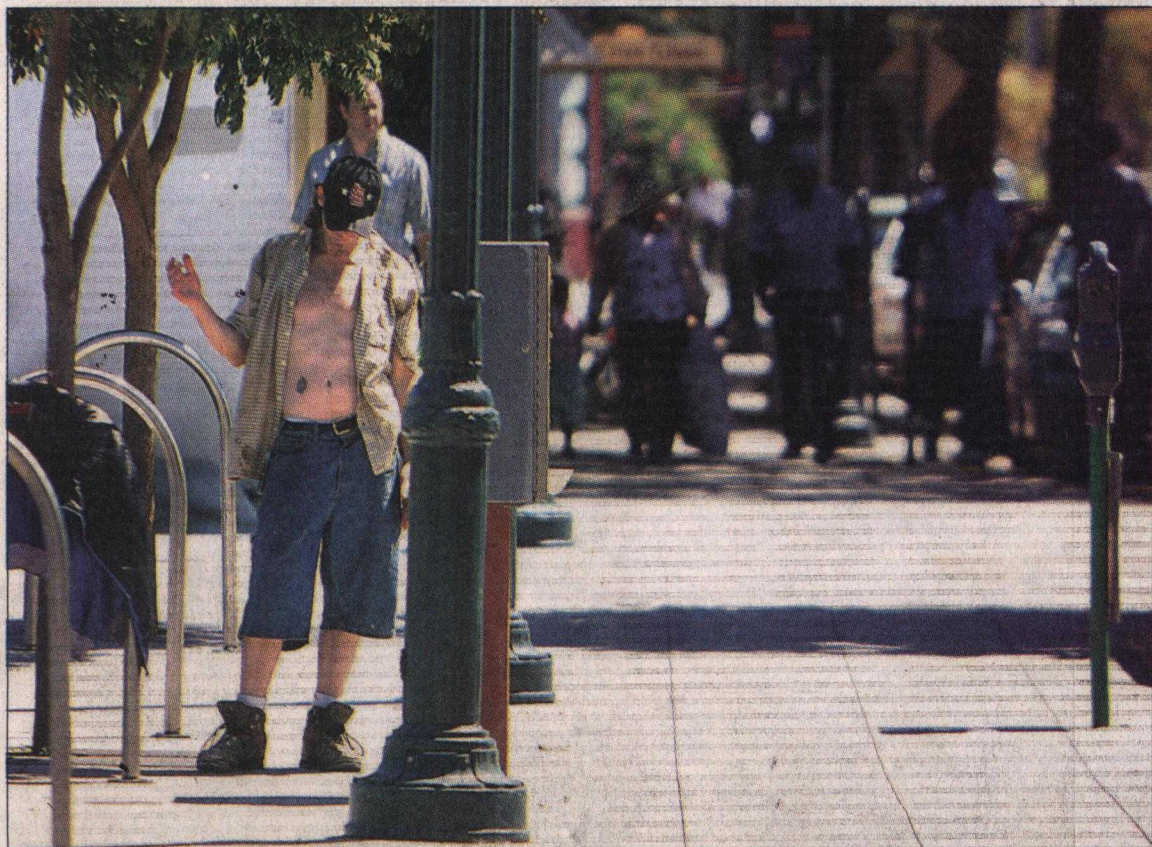


# In search of the future for lower Pacific Avenue



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Plans to move the Metro Center south of Laurel Street are in the works.

## Report highlights what might link between beach, downtown

By **GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

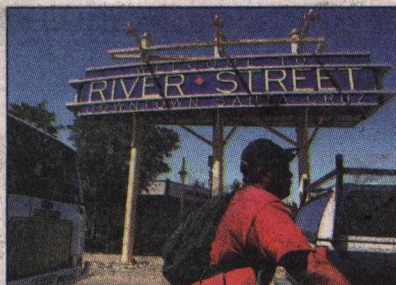
**SANTA CRUZ** — As city leaders create a blueprint for what Santa Cruz should look like in 20 years, a revived lower Pacific Avenue regularly tops the wish list of areas to improve.

Now, some think those wishes might actually come true.

City leaders hope to turn Pacific Avenue south of Laurel Street — a seedy neighborhood complete with drug deals and other criminal activity — into a nicer “gateway” from Main Beach to Pacific Avenue. Under plans taking shape for the area, the stretch would boast commercial and residential properties, a walkway connecting Pacific Avenue to the river levee path, and a rebuilt Metro Center, among other improvements.

The improvements are logical, supporters say, considering the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk saw 3 million visitors last year.

“Why don’t they come shopping down-



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The River Street sign was the last major ‘gateway’ projects encouraging tourists to visit downtown Santa Cruz.

town? We could make some money,” said City Councilman Mike Rotkin.

Those ideas for lower Pacific are detailed in a report by consulting firm Wallace Roberts Todd/Solomon E.T.C. and were presented to the city’s Planning Commission last month. The report

## Changing the feel of lower Pacific Ave.

A new report details possible plans for improvements on lower Pacific Avenue. Ideas include:

- A new, mixed-use bus station for Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District.
- Expanding bike routes between the San Lorenzo River levee and downtown.
- Improved transit service to the area.
- A park where people can gather and hold events.
- Mixed-use development, with commercial space on the first floor and offices or condominiums on top.
- To read the report, visit [www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us](http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us).

SOURCE: City of Santa Cruz

See **PACIFIC** on **PAGE A14**



# Pacific

Continued from Page A1

as commissioned by city leaders last year to explore what changes are possible for that neighborhood.

The report comes as Santa Cruz leaders continue revising their general plan, which will map out development in the city for 20 years. When finished early next year, that plan should spell out how the city will grow over the next two decades.

Some of the ideas, like a south-end gateway to Pacific Avenue, have come around before. It was mentioned in two previous general plans, Rotkin said.

Others, like a new bus station or Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, are already in the works. Those who responded to the city's study said the atmosphere of Pacific Avenue changes palpably at the Metro Center, where pedestrians leave the tony boutiques and coffee shops of the north end of the street behind.

The new station — which is four or five years away — would include apartments on the top floors and stores or restaurants on the ground level.

Ideas for even more mixed-use buildings — with retail space on the bottom and offices or condos on the top — are also popular, according to the report, as is a defined path from the river levee to Pacific Avenue that doesn't leave cyclists or pedestrians cutting through



Lower Pacific Avenue has a distinctly different flavor than the Pacific Avenue blocks toward the north end of the street.

Shmuel Thaler/  
Sentinel

parking lots or crossing dangerous intersections on their way downtown. Supporters also hope that more eyes on that stretch of the city's main drag will help cut crime there.

With two new hotels moving on Pacific Avenue south of Laurel Street, and businesses already peddling their wares at the former Front Street headquarters of Yellow Cab Co. and Santa Cruz Airporth, some hope the momentum for change is finally under way.

Sean Sullivan, manager for Easy Access Developers LLC, is betting as much. His company owns the former taxi headquarters and is building nine condos

near the corner of Pacific and Sycamore Street, and a nine-room hotel on the other side of Pacific Avenue. The hotel should open in November and the condos next summer.

Plans for another hotel with about 80 rooms have been approved for the corner of Pacific and Beach Street.

Sullivan said he hopes the new construction will encourage others to develop there, too. He often sees tourists wandering lower Pacific Avenue, Sullivan said, looking confused as to where they should go.

"If there were more stores on this side (of Laurel), to ease the walk," or "maybe a walkway,"

visitors might feel more comfortable hiking between the city's two biggest tourist areas, Sullivan said.

Chip, who does not use a last name, is the acting executive director of the Downtown Association of Santa Cruz and is on the city's General Plan Committee. He said linking the two tourist draws has long been an issue for the city, but a difficult one for folks to rally behind.

"It's an obvious connection that's been really, really challenging to do," he said.

Contact G. Bookwalter at 706-3286 or [gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com).