



Jim Gibbons trims dead tree downtown.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

# No safe arbor for Mall trees

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SANTA CRUZ — City crews put up Arbor Day banners. Then they began cutting down trees Monday.

As those green banners, proclaiming April 27 as Arbor Day in Santa Cruz, gently blew in the morning breeze, city maintenance workers fired up their chain saws and began the noisy task of cutting down three trees on the Walnut Street side of the city's parking structure.

The ficus trees were casualties of the Christmas freeze when temperatures dipped into the teens, said Parks and Recreation Director Jim Lang. He said about 30 of the trees will ultimately have to be removed from the downtown area.

The trees range in age from 5 to 20 years, Lang said. "This is a marginal climate for those trees, anyway. They just couldn't handle the freeze," Lang

said.

"We had left them there (since the freeze) hoping they'd come back, but they're dead," Lang said. Crews spared a couple Monday, cutting them way back instead of all the way down.

Lang said a group of ficus trees in front of the Del Mar Theater on Pacific Avenue may have to come down, too. An arborist, he said, will make the final determination.

In addition to the dead-tree removal, the city is planning to cut down the small stand of eucalyptus trees at the corner of Pacific and Soquel avenues. If those trees are removed, two-way traffic can be returned on Soquel Avenue, said Public Works Director Larry Erwin. The trees prevent northbound turns onto Pacific, he said.

The trees weren't a problem before the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, but now, since one lane of Soquel is fenced off because of the unstable condition of

the Trust Building adjacent to the street, they prevent the creation of a second lane of traffic.

City crews posted the trees for removal last Friday. Citizens have 10 days to appeal the removal to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Those trees would be removed, anyway, if the City Council adopts a downtown rebuilding plan tonight that calls for straightening out Pacific Avenue. The trees would end up in the middle of the realigned street.

How many of the existing trees on the old Pacific Garden Mall will survive rebuilding is unknown: Vision Santa Cruz committee members last week endorsed a proposal to retain as many as possible. But one of the consultants hired to plan the new landscaping said an arborist has already concluded that only about a half dozen can be saved.