

News

Santa Cruz, California

December 12, 1985

12-12-85 GT Bridge Over Troubled Waters

Riverside Ave. bridge called biggest flood danger to downtown

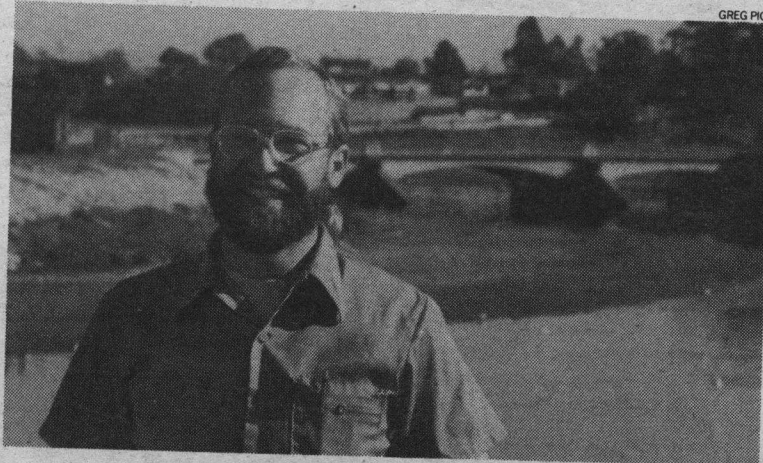
THE SINGLE BIGGEST flood danger facing this city is the Riverside Avenue Bridge, according to a task force that has been studying the problem for almost a year.

Bruce Van Allen, a member of the San Lorenzo River Task Force, said the bridge traps logs and other debris in times of high water, and in effect becomes a dam that backs up water as far as Water Street. The same problem occurs at the Water Street Bridge, but to a much smaller degree, he said.

In addition to the danger posed by the bridges, the 26-year-old levees built by the Army Corps of Engineers are a couple of feet too low to hold back a 100-year flood (a huge flood with the likelihood of occurring once every century).

Until the city is protected from a 100-year flood, federal flood insurance rates will remain out of reach for most downtown businesses.

"At the moment, downtown Santa Cruz is faced with a very critical danger," said Van Allen. "Right now,



Bruce Van Allen: "Downtown is faced with a very critical danger"

the levees will not contain a large flood. Not only do we have the very real danger of a flood, but we also have a heavy economic cloud hanging over the entire downtown area."

There is one bright spot in the gloomy picture. For the first time in years, the city and the corps of engineers agree that the answer to the problem is not yearly dredging.

After spending several months and thousands of dollars conducting simulated computer-controlled floods, both believe the problem is being caused by the bridge and the levees. This is important because the respon-

sibility of fixing the problem can now fall on the federal government, not the financially strapped city.

There are two steps the task force is recommending: One is to raise the levees a couple of feet, and the other is to take out the Riverside Bridge.

Van Allen admitted that this second recommendation may raise a few eyebrows, but he said "it's gotta be done for flood protection." And before the letters start piling up at city hall, Van Allen wants it known that the recommendation may be a blessing in disguise.

If the corps of engineers takes out the Riverside Bridge, they will have to pay for a replacement bridge, which opens up a very inexpensive way for the city to build the long-awaited Ocean Street Bridge.

Van Allen assured GOOD TIMES that a new bridge would be built somewhere before the existing one is closed to traffic.

Once the flood control issue is

(continued next page)

Bridge

(continued from page 5)

taken care of, Van Allen said the city could turn what is now an eyesore into a vibrant new part of the city.

"If we can solve the flood danger, we can turn (the river corridor) into an exciting viable part of town," he said. "We can get economic development, environmental improvement, and even restore the steelhead fisheries. In addition, we can protect residential areas, beautify downtown, and improve traffic circulation."

Van Allen admitted that these pie-in-the-sky improvements will not happen overnight; indeed, they may

take as long as a decade.

"The kind of project to really deal with the flood danger here, at its most optimistic, is going to take years," said Van Allen. "We're dealing with some very large federal bureaucracies that take a long time to do anything."

He added that the public controversy surrounding the bridge removal suggestion would also add some time.

How would Van Allen describe the present situation?

"Very scary," he said. "It's obvious we can't stay with the status quo, and we're doing what we can. We're feeling optimistic, but we're sobered by the fact that the water is rising and here comes more rain." •