

Council will discuss Ocean Street bridge

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SANTA CRUZ — The possibility of a new bridge across the San Lorenzo River at Ocean Street will be discussed Tuesday by City Council members.

An Ocean Street bridge has been suggested as a replacement for the storm-damaged Riverside Avenue bridge and as a new access into the Beach Flats-Boardwalk area.

A state Department of Transportation inspection last summer revealed the Riverside bridge is "in serious danger of collapse," said Bruce Van Allen, former mayor and chairman of the city River Task Force. The structure was damaged during severe storms in 1982 and 1983, he said.

Reports by the task force and Army Corps of Engineers, the agency that built the river flood-control levees in the 1960s, have shown the Riverside bridge to be the city's biggest flood hazard.

Because of its damaged condition and heavy use, Van Allen said, a bridge-replacement project has been given high priority on a list of projects to be funded through the federal Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program.

The project would cost an estimated \$1.7 million. The local share would be 20 percent or, \$340,000, according to a joint report from the public works and planning departments.

The project is one of a package of proposals for flood protection being reviewed by task force members. Other measures include design changes for the Water Street bridge and levees.

Once the flood-protection measures are installed, city officials

hope the Federal Emergency Management Agency will lift existing flood regulations on properties near the river, including downtown parcels.

FEMA put the properties into flood-hazard zones after ruling that existing levees are not sufficient protection for a "100-year" flood. These are the heaviest floods expected in a 100-year period, based on the history of an area.

The federal government would pay for the replacement of the Riverside bridge but not for making it larger.

Van Allen said city officials should start selecting a site for the beach-access bridge and decide whether to replace the Riverside bridge at its existing site, or to rebuild it at Ocean Street. Other plans for redesign of the river area hinge on this decision, he said.

One option is to retain the Riverside bridge, to repair it, and convert it to a pedestrian walkway or shuttle bus stop for beach visitors.

Or, one bridge could be used for incoming beach traffic and the other for outgoing traffic.

In any case, Van Allen said, building of a new bridge would probably take many years. City Council members are considering preliminary plans for a redevelopment district or assessment district in the beach area to pay for improvements.

Council members Tuesday will consider a task force recommendation to include the Ocean Street bridge in an ongoing study of beach traffic-flow patterns.

Council members also will consider applying for federal funds to replace the bridge.

The Army Corps of Engineers is doing short-term repair work now on the bridge to make it flood-safe for this winter.