

Urban scholar urges 'friendlier' mall

PACIFIC GARDEN MALL - 1990

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

1-25-90

SANTA CRUZ — A test of a town's soul can be found in how many public bathrooms it has and how friendly its gathering spots are, a noted scholar of urban design said Wednesday at the Loudon Nelson Center during a lecture on what makes a city liveable.

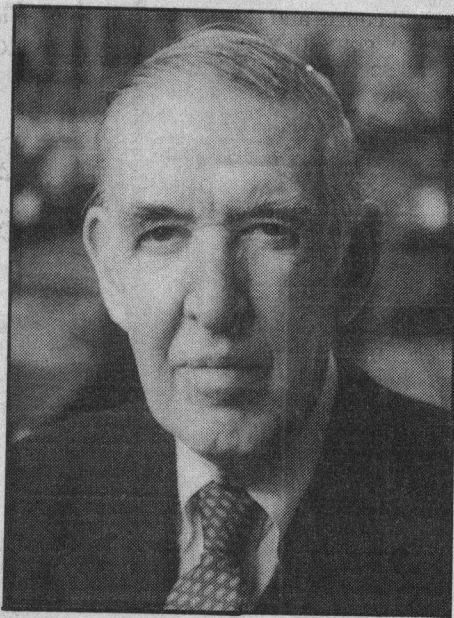
"A downtown needs people on the street to make the system work," William H. Whyte said. "You need to do everything you can to make it friendlier."

Whyte spoke as part of a UC Santa Cruz-sponsored series of weekly lectures on the rebuilding of downtown Santa Cruz.

Whyte has spent the last 23 years studying urban and suburban development and city life.

After taking a look at the Pacific Garden Mall, Whyte stressed that a downtown should have a town square or central gathering spot where people meet, make deals and exchange gossip.

"People have an impulse to move to the center of the action," he said. "We



William H. Whyte

say we want places that are quiet and fenced off areas — well nobody goes to them. Downtowns are not quiet places."

The more people, the better.

A successful and friendly downtown will also discourage so-called "undesirables," Whyte said.

"Cities become obsessed with making the downtown uncomfortable so that a bad guy won't lay down," he said. "Some put spikes in the benches — you don't see any winos using them, or anyone else. Thing to understand is that by and large you don't see them in a successful place. You see them in dark places that are so bad that no one else is there."

He added, however, that he has not studied local problems.

Whyte spent most of the day in Santa Cruz and was encouraged by much that he saw, especially the pavilions.

"I was very impressed," he said. "What it said to me is that there must be imagination in this city and strong leadership to get such a thing done four days after the earthquake."

Whyte singled out the food pavilion as an idea that works, pointing to the wide variety of people and services gathered in one place. Such a compression of

services around a gathering spot can enhance the success of a downtown.

What works in suburban areas, may not work downtown and should be avoided, he said.

Suburban development is low density, with large "mega-structures" such as enclosed malls, surrounded by large parking areas.

Whyte showed photographs of large office complexes that were fortress-like, concrete monoliths. Such architecture, while embraced as modern and safe, is actually cold, forbidding and dangerous, he said, and does little to enhance a downtown area.

A downtown shopping area that offers, non-chain, unique quality shops can be more successful than one that lures in large chain stores that might be found in outlying areas and large shopping malls.

Whyte said that the business community, or city, should be aggressive in pursuing desired businesses.

Whyte also heartily endorsed mixing living and office space above retail stores on the mall.

"I say right-on to that idea," he said.