

A growing city



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Santa Cruz Mayor Katherine Beiers and Ray Sherrod, city arborist, look on as two city workers plant a small tree at the corner of Trescony and Mission streets Thursday morning. The planting was part of the Mission Street widening project kick-off.

Tree plantings signal the start of Mission Street widening project

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Trees
SANTA CRUZ — The rumble of trucks and buzz of cars was almost deafening, but it didn't stop city officials and others from celebrating what seems to be the beginning of a Mission Street renaissance.

Mayor Katherine Beiers on Thursday presided over the planting of four new trees on Mission Street; the city hopes eventually to plant about 400 trees from Shaffer Road to Chestnut Street. The plantings also signify the start of some intensive work along the street, with Pacific Gas and Electric now upgrading gas lines. In mid-August, PG&E is scheduled to relocate about 85 power poles.

Actual widening work is set to begin in September, ending in August 2001. The state Department of Transportation will oversee the project, which will extend from Swift to Chestnut streets.

There are still a lot of details to work out, but Beiers and others at the tree dedication said they were pleased about the \$10 million project, which is 15 years in the making.

"This started out as simply a widening project and with the help of the (Mission Street) Widening Task Force and the community, it really evolved into something that will be special," Beiers said as vehicles roared by.

City workers planted the four melaleuca trees in the morning on Trescony Street near McDonald's at Mission.

Property owners requesting a tree for their property must pledge to water and care for it. They also will receive a small tree-pledge sign.

The Australian trees are perfect for the corridor because they have a small root system and require very little maintenance, city arborist Ray Sherrod said. The trees are on a list of about 100 species that residents and businesses on the stretch are encouraged to plant.

The street is planned to go from two lanes to four in most places, with some left-turn lanes to reduce congestion and improve safety. The corridor has some of the heaviest traffic flows in the county, carrying 20,000-plus vehicles a day, and has the highest rate of accidents, according to traffic studies.

Resident Debbie Bulger, a member of the task force, said she's proud of the city's efforts but realizes there's a lot of work to do still.

"I think this really is a kick-off to a many-phase project," she said.

The trees are part of a landscaping plan paid for by the Santa Cruz County Region-

al Transportation Commission and developed by a city-hired architect and the Mission Street Task Force.

The landscape plan envisions Mission Street as four distinct zones.

- The Natural Bridges zone extends from Shaffer Road to Swift Street. That zone would be a green boulevard of native trees and shrubs.

- The Westside zone is the area between Swift and Laurel streets. It is a mixed-use area of commercial and residential property. A variety of evergreens would be planted there.

- The Mission Hill zone extends from Laurel to the project's end at Chestnut Street. It is also a mixed-use area, but is dominated by historic residential properties. Those properties would be landscaped with flowering trees and low garden fences.

- Inside the Mission Hill zone is the Bayona District, located around Bay Street. The historic commercial district would be enhanced with decorative paving and railings.

The city has about \$600,000 for the landscaping project. Property owners requesting a tree for their property must pledge to water and care for it. They also will receive a small tree-pledge sign, Sherrod said.

About 273 trees are located along the Mission Street corridor. The state Department of Transportation plans to remove about 70 as part of the widening project.