

Pacific Art and Mall

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SANTA CRUZ — Slide shows, shadow sculptures and holographic displays are some of the ideas being proposed for the sides of empty mall buildings.

Others include projections of buildings onto screens, the hanging cloth backdrops found on theater sets, and interpretive displays on vacant lots.

Separate groups of local artists have been working independently to create ideas for the battered Pacific Garden Mall, both in the next few weeks and over the long-term.

"We want to get something up of high quality immediately," said Robin Kandel, an artist who called others together a week ago. "Art is usually an afterthought, now we have the opportunity to make sure it is not an afterthought."

Several artists met Thursday with the Downtown Commission, Arts Commission and city staffers to coordinate efforts for a Downtown Santa Cruz Arts Project or Pacific Garden Mall Arts Project as the plan is variously known.

Typically, the city has "a whole lot of rules why you can't do this," said city Parks and Recreation Director Jim Lang. "In this case they couldn't find any," he said.

More meetings are scheduled for next week. A group of architects and three-dimensional designers will be meeting Wednesday to plan for

dramatic entrances to the downtown commercial pavilions, said Mya Kramer, a graphic artist working with the Downtown Association.

Architect Hugh Carter, president of the Architects Association of Santa Cruz County, is hoping to pull together an intensive three-day workshop for the beginning of January with local and national architects and students to "come up with a realistic vision of the future."

Kramer, who as part of Aftershock, a group of artists, writers and marketing people working with the Downtown Association, sees the chance for "an incredibly visual display" downtown. She anticipates it will be "big on design and little on materials."

Thanksgiving week "every sign painter in Santa Cruz" came together to paint the display signs for the Pavilion entrances, she said.

Kramer said artists nationally are interested in what is happening in Santa Cruz.

Performance spaces are envisioned by some. Also, "large colorful plywood clusters," said Kristine Albrecht.

Some artists are designing distinctive Christmas wrapping paper that downtown merchants could use.

A key point is to make the mall "alive at night with lighting projects," said William Rubel, chairman of the Downtown Commission, who called the various independent groups together. Some lots where buildings once stood present opportunities, Rubel said. There could be "real historical exhibits and fake historical exhibits," he said.