

Earthquake-1989-Watsonville Rebuilding

Downtown update



Kurt Ellison

Engineers John Kariotis, left, and Dan Peterson, right, look over plans to build apartments on the second floor of the quake-damaged Kalich

building in the 400 block of Main Street. With them are architect Greg Cole, second from left, and an owner of the building, Glen Olives.

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Old buildings getting good going-over

By MAYA SURYARAMAN
STAFF WRITER

Watsonville's old downtown buildings may be red-tagged, but that doesn't necessarily mean they must be bulldozed.

In fact, experts in historic preservation stand ready to inspect any pre-1950s building in Watsonville that was damaged by the Oct. 17 quake, to determine whether it can be saved. And the inspection won't cost a dime.

That was the message that the National Trust for Historic Preservation brought to Watsonville yesterday.

The trust and a team of structural engineers, architects and building contractors toured seven buildings along quake-ravaged Main Street. Among the structures visited were those that, until red-tagged, used to house Jack's Cigar Store & Lunchroom, Burdick's Appliance and the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce.

"The majority of the buildings we looked at really had no severe damage, except for the Jepsen and Porter buildings," said John Kariotis, a structural engineer from South Pasadena.

The Jepsen building at 500 Main St. used to house Johnson Drug store. Built in 1903, it was designed by architect William Weeks, who also designed many of Watsonville's other historic buildings. The Porter building at the corner of Main and Maple streets is where Dr. James Taylor's Chiropractic Clinic used to be.

Kariotis said the Jepsen and Porter buildings fared badly during the quake because they were built with unreinforced brick.

The fate of the Jepsen building has been put on hold while owner Kenneth Miller tries to figure out if it's worth it to repair the heavily damaged building, Public Works Director John Cooper said this morning.

The city hasn't given Miller a

deadline for his decision, Cooper said. He said he hoped a decision would be reached soon, because the building isn't likely to make it through another earthquake. Chain-link fencing is still up around the building.

Some of the other buildings on the block need repairs before they can reopen, and others, like the Miramar restaurant, have made minor repairs and are open for business.

Kariotis stressed that red tags were handed out liberally in the days following the quake, and should not be taken as a final verdict.

"The red tag only means 'the tag stays on till the owner does more analysis,'" Kariotis said.

Once analysis is complete, owners may decide whether they want to restore or demolish, he said.

From now to Jan. 31, Kariotis and other historical preservation experts will be available to inspect any commercial

building in Watsonville built before 1950. Owners will get a detailed analysis of structural damage. They will learn whether the building can be saved, how much it would cost, and what restoration tax credits are available. They may also be able to qualify for below-market restoration loans being offered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The free inspections are being funded by a joint grant between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the state Department of Commerce. They are also available in Hollister, Santa Cruz, Salinas and Los Gatos.

Interested property owners may call Ann Buck of the state Department of Commerce, at (916) 322-2571, to schedule inspections, and the National Trust at (415) 956-0610 to inquire about the loans.

Staff writer Chela Zabin also contributed to this report.