



Wally Trabing

Visions, dreams of a rebuilt mall

Earthquake - 1989 - City of S.C. rebuilding

ALREADY, THERE IS talk about what could be done with the Pacific Garden Mall when the mess is cleared.

Talked with Roy Rydell, one of the principal landscapers of the this once-pleasant shopping area.

Ideas for a post-earthquake integrated shopping area are just that. They will eventually boil down to realistic results.

Not many favor enclosing it like the Capitola Mall. There are too many of those around already.

Should it be made into a walking mall without auto traffic?

There is a city called Chester, England, that has a double-decked business district with upper balconies as sidewalks.

Where whole buildings are taken away, Roy said underground parking might be considered under new shops. One idea would incorporate condominiums as second-story units.

I think The Barnyard out of Carmel has a fascinating multiple-layered, garden-type setting of businesses that evokes a kind of coziness and classiness.

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Jeff Oberdorfer, architect, has mall visions.

"If the Cooper House has to come down, it would be a key loss, but on the the other hand a small park could be established which would be integrated with the Octagon museum and the planned McPherson art and history museum."

He thinks the mall should keep its natural, rich, uncovered openness.

As to the controversy over auto traffic, Oberdorfer feels that for such a walk-only-mall to remain vital, it would have to be made active with such things as concerts, farmers' markets, barbecues, outdoor cafes. Foot traffic has be maintained for such a plan be successful. "There are too many malls that have become static without car traffic."

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He also feels that individual creativity should be maintained with storefronts. Older buildings should be retained and reinforced. Underground parking might be difficult because of the high water table, he says.

The Pacific Garden Mall is built over the old San Lorenzo River bed and marsh that ran to Neary Lagoon and out to sea. The mission padres used this rich marsh land to plant their vegetables.

There is a sense of place about downtown Santa Cruz that will draw people's interest.

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Oberdorfer also feels that the mall has turned its back on the river. Probably with reason. It is an ugly gash through the city, its water a sewer ditch and its fauna a scraggly, unsightly scene.

If anything could be done, the river bank is ripe for building decked cafes and landscaped walkways.

Demolition at the head of the mall would cause another key loss. But at the same time, another opportunity will present itself to use vision to create an area that representes the introduction to the mall area.

The redevelopment could encompass continuing the mall to North Pacific Avenue, making the town clock a kind of centerpiece.

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With a mall busy with shoppers and an area for concerts, some architects feel it will naturally solve the constant presence of street people.

Whatever plan evolves must catch the imagination of the public, it must create excitment and all the snob appeal it can muster.

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The key at this juncture is to think big.

Let imaginations run amok.

Reality of a dozen forces will eventually settle the general appearance.

Architect Gary Garmann agrees this "is the time to think big."

Flood risk must be considered, as well as economics, but public enthusiasm will carry a lot of momentum.

Garmann feels we must create a downtown with a 24-hour presence. It must be accessible to the handicapped.

A key is to determine the true nature of its historical distinction.

It should incorporate a cultural center.

The old Civic Auditorium, which has been serving as a Red Cross center, was abandoned yesterday because of a leaking roof.

Why not include the Civic in this broad vision of a new downtown rising out of the ashes of destruction?

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The downtown should be a class act, with bold approaches to beauty and a welcomeness, and a feeling of having been someplace that made you feel good to have shopped there.

It's the time.

Wally Trabing's column appears in the Sentinel