



Artist's conception of the Watsonville Ford's department store. Completion is expected by October of next year.

Ford's Watsonville plans approved

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WATSONVILLE — Ford's department store is coming home.

The Watsonville Design Review Commission on Monday unanimously approved plans for a two-story, 74,550-square-foot store in the exact Main and West Beach street downtown location it once occupied.

The former store was considered the flagship store for the Central Coast chain, having been located there since 1852 and believed to be the oldest department store in California. The old store had to be demolished after the October, 1989 earthquake.

Ford's Senior Vice President Hal Hyde said after the meeting that they hope to begin grading on the site in January, with construction on the building starting in February. He set an opening target date of Oct. 15, 1991 — two days before the earthquake's second anniversary.

"We've already ordered the steel and are asking the city to give us a grading permit even before we get final approval so we can get started," Hyde said.

The new store was called "exciting" by Planning Director Maureen Owens. Hyde called it a "handsome" building which will fit in well with the reconstruction of downtown.

Although only two-thirds the size of the original Ford's, Hyde said the new store will be "much more efficient."

"The old store actually was a combination of around six separate buildings," he added. "This one will make efficient use of space, with fewer interior walls."

The new store will also feature an escalator, which the former one did not have. The restaurant will be moved upstairs, and an elevator will also be installed.

The exterior of the store will have numerous canopies and will also have a 40-foot-high, polished granite entrance on the Main Street side. Other entrances will be from the parking lot and on West

Beach Street. Approximately 400 off-street parking spaces will be provided.

The new building will be earthquake resistant, with a steel frame and cement plaster walls. Contractor will be Rosewall & Sons of Watsonville.

Besides the new store, Ford's has also been granted approval to rebuild its merchandise-receiving service center and corporate-office building across the alley on Beach Street. The former building in the remodeled Appleton Theatre was destroyed in the earthquake, too.

The 36,000-square-foot building is expected to be completed in early August.