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# Council considers panel to oversee rebuilding

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A loose-knit group of people who have been dragging themselves out of bed early once a week to talk about how to rebuild downtown Watsonville has been asked by the city to suggest nine members for a new and powerful advisory committee.

The group, at the same time, warned the City Council that owners of property along Main Street are not sitting around and waiting for it to come up with a master plan — and that the council shouldn't wait for master plans, either.

"People who are footing the bill

downtown are getting things going," Joe Moreno, a member of the Downtown Recovery Committee, told the City Council yesterday. "Some can't wait a year — some will have buildings repossessed, or go broke."

On both the 300 and the 400 blocks of Main Street, property owners have been meeting with each other to discuss rebuilding and revitalizing. City Planning Director Maureen Owens said the 300 block owners have already submitted an overall design plan for their block.

The council, meeting yesterday as the Redevelopment Agency, agreed to let Owens submit the

300 block plan for formal approval in concept, even without an overall downtown design plan in place yet.

It also voted unanimously to direct the Downtown Redevelopment Committee, which began as a Chamber of Commerce post-quake group, to recommend the members of the new committee. The list is to include five people who live outside the city limits and four who live inside the city, at the suggestion of the DRC itself.

The DRC was also asked yesterday to spell out the powers the new city committee should have, and to meet with the city attor-

ney to go over conflict-of-interest laws before recommending anyone.

Kirk Schmidt, acting as spokesman for the DRC, told the council that the new committee would need to have broad powers or risk becoming just another level of bureaucracy for property owners to deal with when they want approval for a plan. Schmidt said the DRC will recommend that the new committee report directly to the council, that it have a paid executive director, and that it have the special right to put items on the council's agenda quickly.

"We're not interested in taking away any of your powers,"

Schmidt told the council, "we're interested in assisting you."

The only way to speed things along, Schmidt added, is if property owners who go to the new committee know that it holds enough sway with the council to be of some help to them, too.

Most of the DRC's proposals for the new committee are in line with advice from the Urban Land Institute panel which visited Watsonville in March for a week of study on ways to rebuild from the Oct. 17 earthquake. The panel reported on its findings at the end of that week, and will be publishing its final report within a few weeks. Many people con-

sider the ULI report the springboard for the new committee as well as for a cohesive design plan.

The DRC proposal differed mainly in calling for nine, rather than five members, and adding the five "regional" members. Schmidt said the DRC felt that since Watsonville hopes to make downtown a shopping center for the whole region, including North Monterey County, it should have representation from outside.

The DRC was also very specific about the life of the committee. Schmidt said it should be disbanded after two years.