

Beach-area plan unveiled



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

An aerial view of Beach Flats and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk shows one area to be redesigned under the plan.

Reaction generally positive; further details sought

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SANTA CRUZ — The public unveiling of the proposed Beach Area plan drew generally positive reviews Tuesday night, although many residents wanted more details before embracing the final picture.

"Everyone agrees that changes are needed ... and that we need to start now," said Mayor Celia Scott. "The details are crucial."

The Beach and South of Laurel Comprehensive Area Plan is a blueprint for the redevelopment of some 80 acres of Santa Cruz. Tuesday's meeting kicked off what will be a series of public sessions before it comes back to the council for final approval.

The plan proposes an unprecedented level of public/private participation that has some Beach Flats residents and their supporters worried that private commercial interests may benefit more than the public.

The focus of that concern are the concessions the city may give the Seaside Co. to expand the Boardwalk in exchange for the company's financial support of affordable housing and public in-

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frastructure improvements.

Most Beach Flats residents who spoke, however, simply wanted the city to come through on the promise spelled out in the plan: A safe, revitalized neighborhood that offers clean, affordable housing.

"We're not asking for more or less than other residents of the city are receiving," said one resident.

Some speakers said they remain distrustful of the city and the Seaside Co., and the announced intention to provide affordable housing for Beach Flats

residents displaced by redevelopment.

"We're dealing with people's lives here," said resident Eddie Zamora. "The word 'relocation' through history does not conjure up pretty pictures."

Vice Mayor Scott Kennedy acknowledged that details of the plan still must be worked out, but he noted that simply getting this far is an achievement of political will and community consensus.

The proposed plan is a comprehensive approach to revitalizing South of Laurel and Beach Area neighborhoods while building a

new commercial base. It also proposes changes that would better link downtown with the Beach Area.

It's the culmination of years of false starts on the part of the city as it has struggled to redevelop the area.

"We're not being forced by natural disaster to do anything," said Kennedy, comparing the effort to the rebuilding of downtown. "We have the force of human disaster."

Councilman Michael Hernandez said the plan offers more than the chance for new housing for Beach Flats residents.

"When we look at the creation of jobs in the neighborhood, we're looking at the creation of jobs for the younger people who may be able to find a way out," said Hernandez.

Copies of the plan are available in the Planning Department for \$20. The public also may review the plan in local public libraries, as well as the Beach Flats Community Center. Tapes of Tuesday's meeting in both English and Spanish also will be made available by the city.