

Progress report: Earthquake recovery advances

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Watsonville is moving forward on almost all of the recommendations made by the nationally-known Urban Land Institute in its study on how the city could best make a comeback after the earthquake, a representative of the city's informal Downtown Redevelopment Committee said.

Jeanne Clark said the committee spent some time evaluating

the city's progress on achieving the goals set forth by the ULI. She said the committee has found that "most of the recommendations are being implemented."

At the City Council meeting Tuesday night, Clark ticked off examples. Ford's is returning to Main Street, where it will provide an "anchor" for the downtown. Further down Main Street, the post office is being constructed. Housing is being considered above a number of downtown buildings

and a project is planned for the 100-block of Main Street. Parking and a *mercado*, or Mexican-style open-air market, are being studied by committees and consultants.

The ULI's recommendation that the county be encouraged to move the courthouse to downtown has been rejected by the DRC. A large supermarket and space for cultural events are still lacking, Clark said, and the fate of the post office once the new building is complete has yet to be decided.

Progress still needs to be made on storm drainage and levee improvements, curtailing truck traffic downtown and the establishment of design guidelines for downtown, she said. Another suggestion, that the city consider purchasing a piece of land on Main Street near Freedom Boulevard, which now holds a taco stand, and landscape it for a nice visual entrance to the city, has been discussed but not acted on.

Clark urged the city manager to

take an aggressive role in carrying out the remainder of the ULI recommendations.

She also said she was concerned that much of the downtown was going to public rather than retail uses, which will affect not only sales downtown, but property tax revenue, since public agencies aren't taxed.

Charlene Shaffer, the executive director of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce, gave the

council an update on downtown recovery Tuesday night.

Shaffer said estimates of repairs to the Chamber of Commerce building are running at \$245,000 and the chamber has been meeting with its architect and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Jalisco Restaurant will hold its grand opening Friday night in the building that once housed the Pa-

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cific Gas and Electric Co.'s offices on Main Street, she said.

The design for the new Ford's department store will come before the city's Design Review Committee Monday. The new store will include an escalator and an eatery on the second floor.

Hal Hyde, senior vice president of Ford's, said the new store will be constructed by Rosewall and Sons and that the company has "ordered the steel" for the building.

Also Tuesday night, the council voted to terminate its lease with Porter Building Associates in order to expedite earthquake repairs.

Porter Building Associates, which owns the building and leases the land under it from the city through a 25-year contract, has been unable to get financing to repair the earthquake-damaged building. By terminating the lease,

the city "takes back" the building, making it eligible for FEMA funds, which can be used to repair publicly-owned buildings.

According to the agreement, the city will reinstate Porter Building Associates on the lease once the building is repaired. If the city is not able to get FEMA funds, the lease will not automatically be reinstated, leaving the building in the city's hands.

Carlotta Woolcock, area manager for the Santa Cruz County branch of the Western Service Workers Association, spoke against the arrangement, saying that she objected to public funds being used in this manner. She said the money should be spent on individuals who have suffered from the earthquake or to the city for its unreimbursed costs.

Mayor Todd McFarren said he shared some of Woolcock's concerns, but said the partners weren't "making a killing" on the building and the city was going to get the building back at the end of the contract, so it's "an investment for the city ...not just a bailout for the Porter Associates."