

Watsonville doesn't want pedestrian mall downtown

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WATSONVILLE — One thing is certain regarding the future of downtown Watsonville: it won't be turned into a pedestrian-oriented mall — as the Pacific Garden Mall was before the earthquake.

That was the consensus Tuesday morning from members of the Watsonville Development Committee, which is working on revitalizing downtown business. One of the keys toward that end is the concept of developing a farmer's market (El Mercado) downtown to attract Latino shoppers.

The idea of getting some of the traffic off Main Street, which currently has four lanes with on-street parking, was rekindled by committee member Lorraine Litchfield. She noted how difficult it is for pe-

destrians on Main Street, particularly when they need to cross it.

But, de-emphasizing vehicle traffic in favor of pedestrians was given a quick thumbs-down by others.

Both City Manager Steve Salomon and consultant Mike Conlon, who was hired by the city to do a downtown retail/marketing study, said pedestrian-oriented malls once popular in the 1970s are no longer popular. Conlon went on to call them "proven disasters," adding, "For the most part, the more traffic you have, the better for businesses."

At the same time, though, Conlon said restricting the through-traffic of large trucks on Main Street might be helpful. He said such a suggestion will be included in his report, which will be completed in a few weeks. Salomon al-

so said the city is moving forward on plans to widen Rodriguez Street, which runs parallel to Main Street, in order to take some of the traffic burden off Main Street, which can get congested.

"We're kind of caught in a dilemma," said City Councilman Oscar Rios. "Do we want to try to keep Watsonville a small town, or make it attractive to growth where we'll get all those big-city problems along with it like traffic? We want to make downtown feasible, yet profitable."

Dick Bernard, co-chairman of the Watsonville Development Committee, noted that no matter what is done downtown, "There'll always be a certain percentage of clientele who will be wedded to Crossroads (shopping center on Green Valley Road)."

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