

✓ Change machines may change Pacific Ave.

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SANTA CRUZ — No change for the parking meter?

Two change machines planned for Pacific Avenue are about to steal all the collateral from that excuse, and at the same time eliminate people sitting on the sidewalk at a popular downtown corner.

One machine is scheduled to be installed at Church Street in front of a vacant lot owned by the Rittenhouse family.

The other will be at Cathcart Street, in front of a vacant lot where Ford's Department Store stood before it was destroyed by the 1989 earthquake.

The machines, which resemble a newspaper rack, are city-owned bill-changing machines which were once on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, but became unnecessary when the wharf's parking meters were replaced by attendants in booths.

Once the machines are installed, it will be illegal to sit on the sidewalk at those corners. That stipulation is part of a city sitting ordinance prohibiting sitting on the sidewalk in front of buildings and within 53 feet of any outdoor money-changing machine.

Both corners have been legal sitting spots since they are in front of vacant lots.

The Cathcart corner, in particular, has become a popular hangout — sometimes drawing dozens of sidewalk sitters who have legally lined the cyclone fence to pass the day with friends.

But downtown merchants haven't been nearly as smitten with the corner. They have complained that the Cathcart corner continued to tarnish the city's image and that shoppers have been scared by the congregations.

According to John Lisher, a member of the Downtown Commission that recommended the two locations for consideration today by the City Council, the spots weren't picked intentionally to unseat the sidewalk sitters.

"If it serves two purposes, that's OK, but that's not where I'm coming from," said Lisher.

The locations were picked because they are in the center of town, and a recent increase in parking rates boosted the need for quarters, Lisher said.

The machines are tentatively scheduled to be installed by June.