

✓ Watsonville sets to study rebuilding

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WATSONVILLE — Grants for devising strategies to rebuild the earthquake-ravaged downtown have been awarded to Watsonville city officials and the Chamber of Commerce.

The city has received state funding from the Earthquake Emergency Grant Aid Program. The grant will allow the city to hire consultants to help determine what the downtown should look like, what kinds of uses to encourage and what street pattern would be best.

Assistant Planner Pat Downs said the city received unofficial word that the grant had been approved, but officials are still waiting to hear how much they will get.

The city applied for \$45,000 in state

grants.

Chamber Executive Director Charlene Shaffer said Friday that her organization has also received unofficial word that it is getting a study done — for free — by the Urban Land Institute.

The ULI is a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization of volunteers. Typically the studies cost a community \$81,000, but in special cases the institute will do them for free.

The two grants will dovetail with each other to help downtown recover, Shaffer said.

The institute will send a panel of up to 10 experts to Watsonville the week of March 18 to interview a wide range of residents, merchants, officials, bankers and developers.

After five days, the panel will hold a public meeting to discuss its findings. Within two months of its visit, the panel is expected to release a written report.

Before the group's arrival, the community is required to devise a set of questions it wants the panel to study.

The chamber met last week and came up with a broad list of concerns, including whether housing is appropriate above commercial uses downtown; how much commercial and industrial space should be in the city; what effect adding more government offices would have on downtown; should the city move Highway 152 off Main Street; and what should downtown look like?

These questions will be gathered in a briefing book by Feb. 18.

The Urban Land Institute is also doing a free study for Santa Cruz, but a

different panel will be sent to Watsonville because of the cultural and economic differences of the two communities.

Watsonville's population is about 60 percent Latino, with large Yugoslavian, Japanese and Filipino communities, too.

Shaffer said the institute's report might not provide all the answers the city needs at this critical juncture, but she said it would point to areas that might require further study.

"It might be we're told we need a more defined marketing study of downtown," she said.

Enthusiasm for the study and downtown recovery is high, according to Shaffer.

"It's synergistic," Shaffer said. "The quake has gotten everybody really focused."