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GREG PIO



**Corbett and Carter: "Here's an opportunity to pull this city together the way it should be"**

Downtown

## South Pacific Dream Sparks Architects

MORE than 20 years ago, late Santa Cruz dreamer Chuck Abbott had a seemingly preposterous idea to turn a seedy dying street called Pacific Avenue into a vibrant "garden mall" complete with trees, flowers and ringing cash registers.

Today, two local architects have what some pessimists may believe to be an equally preposterous idea: to turn that "dead zone" between the Metro Center and the Municipal Wharf into an equally vibrant zone that will link two of the city's most important tourist/commercial areas (the beach and the mall) while pumping money into city coffers that were hit hard by the relocation to Capitola of auto dealerships in the area now.

Hugh Carter and Bob Corbett, neither of whom have land or clients in the dying area, have been working for 18 months to produce a "schematic concept" (not a formal plan) of what the area could look like in the near future. The two have received no public or private money, but have relied on advice from city planners, input from downtown businesses, a love for the city, and plain common sense.

"We need to concentrate on creating a link between the beach and downtown — not just a link to drive your car through, but an area every bit as enjoyable to walk through as the Pacific Garden Mall or along the beach," said Carter. "We thought it would be horrible if that area turned into another Ocean Street, which is the epitome of what happens when nobody looks at an area, and you get piecemeal development."

"Here's an opportunity to really pull this city together the way it should be," Corbett said, "but it's not going to happen if it doesn't happen very soon. Someone's going to get the

idea to put up some dinky little office building, and it's going to kill the whole idea."

Carter and Corbett have not offered any firm ideas for each and every parcel of land, but have simply given an idea of what the area could look like with careful planning. The two envision a heavy dose of commercial space at ground level, with office space on upper floors. Existing residential areas would be faced by new housing, and there is a new park across Front Street from the Toyota dealership.

But the major attraction of the schematic concept is a "pedestrian spine" set away from the street with a series of "open public spaces linked together like pearls on a necklace." These open spaces, or plazas, would be enclosed or semi-enclosed, and would be surrounded by shops.

The area is already zoned commercial, which would make it easier for Carter and Corbett's dream to be realized. By the same token, the existing commercial zoning also would make it a lot easier for a developer to come in now and put up one of those "dinky little office buildings" that makes Corbett shudder.

The two said they've gotten a lot of verbal support from city planning staff and area business owners, although nobody's been thrilled enough to offer any money to see their dreams bear fruit. To garner more public support for their ideas, Carter and Corbett will be holding a free public meeting at Monterey Savings on Front Street on Monday, Oct. 13, at 7 p.m.

"There are still a million hurdles to go through," said the eternally optimistic Corbett. "What we're saying is here's a chance to do something good for our city." •