

✓ Earthquake 1989 - Watsonville - Rebuilding

Watsonville on fast track back

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WATSONVILLE — Drive down Main Street in Watsonville and you'll have to fight traffic, pedestrians and construction equipment. Drive down the Pacific Garden

■ *Is Watsonville far ahead of Santa Cruz in rebuilding? Not really — Page A2*

Mall in Santa Cruz — what part that is open to vehicles — and you'll see shells of buildings, gaping holes in the ground, and yes, some shoppers, too.

How is Watsonville seemingly recovering from the October 1989

earthquake faster than Santa Cruz?

Cooperation, commitment, energy and hard work were all mentioned by business leaders and city officials. And they also cited the distinct differences in political philosophies between the two largest cities in Santa Cruz County.

Members of the Watsonville Development Committee, helping push downtown rebuilding by recommending designs for a fast-track planning process, recently cited an example of those differences — Santa Cruz' 128-page, \$260,000 recovery document by the San Francisco-based ROMA group.

Santa Cruz Mayor Jane Yokoyama, however, says the perception that Watsonville is rebuilding faster is not entirely accurate and

'Santa Cruz is bogged down in all the planning. We're not tying people up to a specific set of hard rigid rules.'

— *Ralph Oliver, Watsonville Development Group.*

that the two cities' downtowns are not really comparable (see story Page A2). Watsonville Committee members maintained that while Santa Cruz continues to plan their downtown recovery, Watsonville is simply going out and doing it.

"Santa Cruz is bogged down in all the planning," said Ralph Oliver, co-chairman of the Watsonville Development Group. "We're

not tying people up to a specific set of hard rigid rules."

Oliver compared both cities to boxers who got a few teeth knocked out in a fight. "The difference is just because you have a few holes, you don't have to pull out all your teeth and replace them," he said. "That's what Santa Cruz is doing."

Hal Hyde, senior vice president for Ford's department stores —

which had stores in both downtowns before the earthquake — conceded that the political structure and officials in Santa Cruz and Watsonville is much different.

"Watsonville has been very cooperative, very anxious to get us back," he said. "They approved our plans in stages. For example, we submitted our foundation plan before we had the entire building designed."

On the other hand in Santa Cruz, talk has centered around setback requirements to let in air and provide space for outdoor cafes.

"Watsonville had the Urban Land Institute do a study, the city and community accepted the direction and went forward," Hyde said. "Santa Cruz had a ULI study and then appointed Vision Santa Cruz

with many people. They did further studies with ROMA, and then had further delays."

Watsonville Mayor Todd McFarren pointed to the Urban Land Institute study and a retail/market-ing study, both of which cost the city only about \$60,000, as proof that Watsonville didn't just jump into rebuilding without planning.

"We just did the studies simultaneously with all the reconstruction," McFarren said. "We have no bad feelings here against Santa Cruz."

City Manager Steve Salomon agreed, adding, "We just tried to be very aggressive in getting federal funding. We're pushing very hard to get projects done."

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Fast track

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Planning Director Maureen Owens maintained Watsonville property owners also have a different attitude than others.

"We have a tough group of people here who weren't going to let this catastrophe have a long-term effect," she said. "The commitment was right there from the beginning."

Both Oliver and fellow co-chairman of the Watsonville Development Committee, Dick Bernard, cited their loose-knit, informal committee as helping to gain concurrence on rebuilding plans. "We didn't have a supreme leader," Bernard said.

Oliver pointed to city officials' attitudes as helping, too. "There's a tremendous cooperation between

the city, property owners and the development committee," he said. "The city is fast-tracking plans through — plans that the committee has recommended."

Helping further with that commitment was the fact that Ford's officials decided very quickly to rebuild on its exact Main and West Beach street downtown location it once occupied, Owens said. Once property owners saw that downtown's anchor store was returning, they moved forward.

Both Owens and Salomon added that Watsonville's downtown serves a different clientele than Santa Cruz.

"We don't serve tourists like Santa Cruz," Owens said.

Added Salomon, "We're in a

whole different game. Watsonville is an old, established community. Downtown is the center of the Pajaro Valley, and remains so."

For instance, with many Latinos living in downtown Watsonville, the downtown area has always had stores that catered to them. Those shoppers were used to shopping downtown, and were quick to return as soon as stores rebuild.

How quickly those stores and other developments are coming back downtown is even surprising Owens.

"Right after the earthquake, if you had asked me how long it would take to get where we're at now, I would have said 5-7 years. "But it became clear within a couple of months that Watsonville wasn't going to sit around and wait. We were going to do it."