

84.9

West County News

December 4, 1984

**Downtown emphasis to be softened**

4 DEC 84 WEST CO. NEWS

**Council approves General Plan changes**

by Bruce Robinson

The revisions of the Downtown Element of the Sebastopol General Plan recommended by the city's planning commission won the backing of a 3-2 majority of the city council last

Wednesday, and will be formally adopted at the council's next meeting Dec. 5.

A second amendment to the General Plan that would eliminate Route E from the document was also tentatively approved (see sidebar) and will be implemented on the same

schedule.

Former city councilmember Ed Nomura instigated the changes, arguing that the original Downtown Element was unfairly detracting from potential commercial growth in other parts of Sebastopol. Opponents of the Redwood Marketplace project tried to invoke portions of the document to block construction of that new shopping center.

But councilmember Bill Roven-tini argued that the changes advanced by the planning commission did not go far enough. "The state does not require a downtown element," he declared. "I say let's delete it."

"Sebastopol's economic climate was healthier and more diverse 25 years ago," Roven-

tini contended, before such city impositions on business as parking assessment districts, earthquake stability requirements and sign ordinance limitations. "Downtown is developed and has been for years," he concluded, "Let's give someone else a chance."

Councilmember Howard Reeser also questioned the effectiveness of the proposed changes, and asked if the use of the term "downtown" couldn't be entirely eliminated from the general plan. Commercial development anywhere in Sebastopol "can be controlled by zoning," Reeser contended.

But Richard Johnson appeared to speak for the rest of the council when he said that the need for "parity, equality and fairness" among all com-

mmercial property owners in the city had been "simply accomplished" by the proposed amendments. "I'm very, very happy with the planning commission," Johnson said.

Both Mayor Tom Miller and councilmember Gwen Anderson had expressed reservations about making any major changes in the General Plan at an earlier council meeting, but lent their support to the modifications prepared by the planners.

State law limits cities to no more than four General Plan amendments per year, and requires all proposed changes be studied by the city's planning commission. Both these amendments were requested by the council shortly after last spring's city elections.