

Polishing 'The Jewel'

Architects Sketch Ideas for La Jolla

By GENE YASUDA, *Times Staff Writer*

With its seaside cottages dotting a terraced terrain and streets lined with art galleries, La Jolla—known as “the Jewel of San Diego”—has rarely been labeled a troubled community.

But the La Jolla residents who gathered to devise a growth plan at a weekend workshop—sponsored by the La Jolla Town Council with help from the California State Coastal Conservancy—made it clear that not all is perfect in the coastal community.

About 130 residents told five nationally renowned architects invited to the workshop that the city's recent growth has gone unguided.

They said reckless, uncoordinated development by profit-oriented developers has been insensitive to La

Jolla's unique natural setting and has, in turn, increased traffic congestion and stripped pedestrians of spacious walkways.

Like French architecture students of old, the design experts summoned to La Jolla for the Design *Charrette* scribbled and sketched feverishly to create a plan that would allow the coastal community to grow, yet preserve its quaint village flair. The brainstorming session was the first stage in a town council plan to develop specific projects to improve La Jolla.

“In France, a teacher would send around a cart, which was called a *charrette*, to collect his pupils’

design models,” said Robert Whittemore, president of La Jolla Town Council, which has 1,300 members.

“Sometimes, a pupil would jump in the *charrette* to add last-minute touches to his project before it got to his teacher,” Whittemore said. “We’ve tried to create that kind of creative intensity by locking up all these experts together in a room for the weekend. That’s why we called this a Design *Charrette*.”

The creative intensity—many of the architects worked on their plans until 1 a.m. Sunday—produced ideas to heighten the quality of La Jolla with landscaping, stricter guidelines for business development, preservation of historic buildings and an emphasis on the community's natural beauty.

“La Jolla has many of the qualities that are found in Mediterranean communities, and many of them have wonderful overviews to the sea,” said Andrew Spurlock, a recipient of the American Society of Landscape Architect's national merit award.

“I think you should establish an overview at the end of Girard [Avenue], possibly a park or an arboretum that would give a wonderful view of the ocean,” said Spurlock, who has worked on several projects in Southern California, including Santa Monica's Ocean

Park and Beachfront facilities.

A similar idea was proposed by Christopher Alexander, who has taught architecture for 25 years at the University of California, Berkeley. He favored creating the “Girard Gardens,” a series of terraced gardens leading to the ocean.

Alexander also endorsed closing the end of Girard to traffic, allowing pedestrians more opportunity to enjoy the proposed garden. Such plans went hand-in-hand with other proposals to widen sidewalks, which received the support of residents who said they want to reclaim the streets for pedestrians. They said La Jolla's growing status as a seaside resort has attracted more tourists and, with it, more cars.

“During the workshop we heard many of you express your disgust over the new office buildings that have been built,” said Bruce D. Judd, a partner with Architectural Resources Group, a San Francisco-based firm specializing in historic preservation.

“We agree that these vast, horizontal structures with dark glass windows and polished granite are inhumane.” He recommended planting tall trees in front of such “block busters” and building fabric awnings to make them more appealing to pedestrians.

“This is just the beginning,”

Whittemore said of the creative sessions.

The architects, who were each paid \$2,500 for their work, will submit a report outlining their recommendations to the La Jolla Town Council, Whittemore said. Although he could not say when the report would be completed, he said when finished it would be used to select projects for community backing.

A second design *charrette* may be held in October to devise specific plans for individual projects, Whittemore said.

“The whole idea behind this was not to worry about whether we can afford to do something or not, but just come up with goals we really wanted to accomplish,” he said.

Recruiting finances from a variety of sources, including the community, local businesses, the city and possibly the Coastal Conservancy, is the best way of achieving such goals, said Peter Brand, of the coastal conservancy.

“We were called in by the La Jolla Town Council because of our previous experience in similar projects,” said Brand.

“If out of this workshop La Jolla can come up with a definite plan, and gain the support of the community, I think they can get the money to carry out their projects.”