

# Hotel face lift sent packing

## Council sees room for improvement in renovation plan



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

The WestCoast Santa Cruz Hotel is a Westside icon, albeit an unattractive one, many residents say.

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*Hotels & Boarding Houses*

SANTA CRUZ — The City Council unanimously knocked down a \$4 million expansion and face lift for the clunky WestCoast Santa Cruz Hotel.

The West Cliff Drive building sticks out above Cowell Beach like a beige sore thumb. Local historian Ross Eric Gibson once called it “the perfect example of what people didn’t want to see as a form of architecture.”

But some council members Tuesday said proposed Spanish-themed roofing and an additional 26 rooms would only add girth and height to an already hefty building.

To qualify for a variance from city building height limits, the owners had to prove the changes would benefit the public. Councilman Keith Sugar said he didn’t see how the changes amounted to much public good.

“One of the slightly incongruous things in my mind was the fact they were trying to beautify a really massive edifice by actually bulking it up,” Sugar said. “I certainly welcome another attempt, but this one fell a bit short.”

“There’s a pretty wide consensus that it’s an unattractive building,” Sugar said. “The question is, can anything be done to beautify it, and I don’t know the answer to that question.”

At the council meeting, members of the public didn’t say much about the design but strongly objected to the planned removal of six redwoods in the front to make way for the expansion. The trees were planted just after the hotel was built in 1972.

The structure now looks like an urban hospital from the 1970s.

“Look at it, it’s hideous,” said hotel general manager

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The hotel’s seaside rooms offer impressive views of Monterey Bay.

## Renovation

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Chris Ferrante, disappointed at news of the council’s action. “It needs to be updated. I think people drive up and their first impression is, ‘Yeck. I’m paying \$200 for that?’”

Ferrante said the plan for an exterior makeover was more about aesthetics than economics. She said the expansion was necessary to finance the decorative changes.

Bob Suits, president of the Northwest Hospitality Group, which owns and operates the hotel, doesn’t plan to go back to the council.

“The only place to build the rooms is where they don’t want me to build the rooms,” he said. He said if he built an extension anywhere else on the property, it would destroy neighbors’ views and have structural problems.

Suits said renovations “would have given Santa Cruz a landmark residents can truly be proud of.”

The 10-story building, formerly known as the Dream Inn, is the city’s largest hotel. Its interior is newly renovated, but its exterior has been compared to a shoe box or a cinder block.

“It could use some help,” said hotel guest Dennis Bachman of Woodland, staring up at the big pile rising above him.

The plans would have added a seven-story tower, adding 26 street-facing rooms to the 163-room hotel. It also would have given the exterior a Spanish colonial look with a tile roof and white stucco.

The plans would have made the 87-foot elevator tower slightly higher and increased the building height from 66 to 73 feet.

The hotel, with expansive views of the Monterey Bay and Boardwalk, charges \$213 a room weekdays, \$243 on weekends, and up to \$400 for a suite. It is often booked solid in summer.

The owners say they have invested \$14 million to remodel guest rooms and \$3 million to remodel the restaurant and meeting areas, and that the additional rooms would have generated \$150,000 annually in city hotel taxes.

Tourists strolling past the hotel seemed lukewarm about the idea of big changes. But one WestCoast guest, Robert Wilson of Santa Rosa, said the hotel should be able to make the changes it wants.

He grumbled, half jokingly, about “tree-hugging, non-business socialists.”

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