

Banks

SC Tells BofA: No Mall Demolition

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The Santa Cruz City Council Tuesday reaffirmed its ban on demolition of buildings along the Pacific Avenue Mall.

It also turned back an appeal by the Bank of America for an exception to the ban so that a new office building can be built at the corner of the mall and Soquel Avenue.

The reaffirmation of the ban came on a 4 to 3 vote after the same majority had voted against a motion to repeal the ban.

Voting to retain the ban were Mayor Joseph Ghio, Bert Muhly, Charlotte Melville and Carole DePalma.

Voting against the ban were Vice Mayor Larry Edler, John Mahaney and Jim Hammond.

In another action related to its review of the city demolition ordinances Tuesday, the council reserved for itself the right to decide whether historic buildings listed in the city's Historic Building Survey may be demolished.

This action came after a proposal to put the buildings under a special protective ordinance

and to assign to the city Historic Preservation Commission review authority over demolition applications.

Carlos Telleria, assistant vice president for Continental Service Co., which is handling the Bank of America's proposed new building for the mall, objected to having the historic commission rule on demolition permits for buildings listed in the survey.

He questioned whether the commission could conduct a fair hearing on such permits because "it appears to be trying to save all the buildings in the survey and that this prejudices the matter.

Councilman Bert Muhly concurred it would be wiser to use the commission only in an advisory capacity on these cases, and the whole proposal was returned to the planning commission for a rewrite that would officially make the council the decision-maker in these cases.

The Bank of America issued to strong debate over the fairness of the ban that is preventing construction of a new headquarters building which bank officials say is needed urgently.

Melville, who originally proposed the mall ban, indicated several times that she is aware

there are technical reasons which the bank feels would make it difficult for the exterior of the present building to be retained. She mentioned constraints imposed by the bank vault.

Then she said she might be more willing to give the bank an exception if it were to redesign the proposed building so that its entrance would be on the mall rather than on Soquel Avenue.

Hammond said the city had no right to force the bank to be in the historic preservation business and to keep the present structure standing.

But Muhly contended that,

"the design of the mall should not be dictated by a bank vault." He said the city has a big public investment on the mall and that it is up to the council to preserve the mall "integrity."

Mahaney tried to get agreement that an exception to the ban be granted the bank with the understanding that the design of the new building would have to be approved by the council.

But that was blocked by City Attorney Rod Atchison, who said the current ordinance would have to be repealed and something else then substituted.

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