

LA BAHIA

Advisers weigh hotel renovation

Historic commissioners
evaluate losing most
of 1926 building

By J.M. Brown

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SANTACRUZ » The Santa Cruz Historic Preservation Commission debated Wednesday whether to recommend city leaders approve the proposed La Bahia project, which would transform the 1926 landmark Beach Street apartments into a 165-room full-service hotel.

The plans by French Resources Group, which calls for restoring the southeastern portion of the

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Hotel

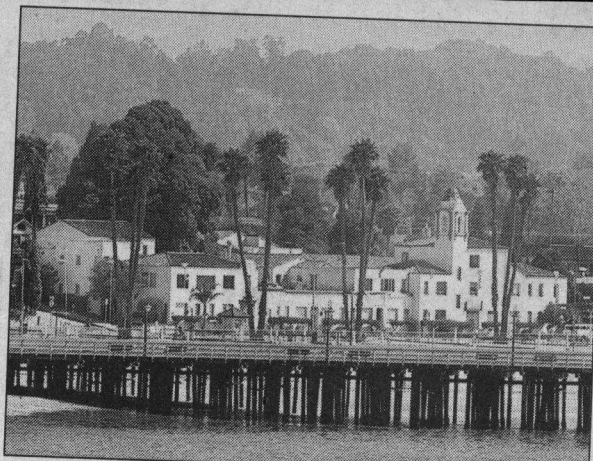
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Spanish Colonial Revival structure containing a tiled bell tower, require permits for historic alternation and demolition, as well as removal of the site from the city's historic register. Eight of the 44 existing apartments will be converted into guests rooms and the tower repaired, but the rest of the building will be taken down.

The commission did not vote by the time the Sentinel went to press.

An economic study found that greater or full renovation, studied as part of a state-required environmental analysis, would not be financially feasible. The environmental report identified the loss of historic resources as an unavoidable significant impact, but the city can ultimately make findings of overriding concerns, such as economic and social benefits such as jobs and tax revenue.

"No prudent investor would go forward those alternatives," planner Ryan



DAN COYRO — SENTINEL FILE

The Santa Cruz Historic Preservation Commission considered the La Bahia Hotel renovation project Wednesday. The 1926 Spanish Colonial Revival building is a Beach Street landmark.

Bane said of greater preservation.

Longtime historian Carolyn Swift said the city has put a panel charged with preserving historic resources in a difficult position.

"They are essentially asking you to demolish La Bahia," Swift said. "If you can do that easily as you sit here tonight, I'm really wondering what you commission is for. The city's overriding concern is economic gain and

that comes down to greed."

The historic value of La Bahia has proven to be a stumbling block for previous renovation plans.

A project approved in 2003 called for full rehabilitation but was abandoned for financial reasons. A second plan, which saved only the bell tower, was denied in 2011 by the state Coastal Commission.

The current plans were designed by the Leddy

Maytum Stacy architectural firm responsible for historic renovation within San Francisco's Presidio and elsewhere. Conditions of approval include documentation of the building and reuse of materials where possible.

Historian Ross Gibson, who served on the commission when the beach area plan was passed, said, "I don't see reflected in the modern interpretation of the building the La Bahia as a historic building. Rather, I see the type of motel architecture we were trying to get rid of when we formulated (the beach) plan."

But Ian McRae, proprietor of downtown's Hula restaurant and the ArtBar & Cafe at the Tannery Arts Center, compared the La Bahia to the nearly complete historic renovation of the former Salz Tannery.

"Everyone has to make compromises for the greater good of project and community or nothing is going to get done," he said. "It's time to get this project underway."

City Council will weigh in Sept. 9.