

Debate on demolition of old SC police wing

6-30-91



Historic Preservation Commissioner Ross Gibson and architect Matthew Thompson discuss the future of the old police wing at City Hall on Wednesday. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

It's old and in the way, or an artifact to be preserved

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The city that lost so many of its historic buildings in the 1989 earthquake now is considering tearing down one of its own, the old police wing of City Hall.

Demolition, however, would be over the objections of the city's Historic Preservation Commission and others who say the building should be preserved and new police quarters built elsewhere.

"Santa Cruz has lost enough of her history and we don't need to authorize more loss," said Jim Stroupe, president of Architect's Association of Santa Cruz County. "It makes no sense to demolish it."

Debate over the significance and future of the police wing has been under way since the Loma Prieta quake destroyed dozens of historic buildings downtown. The debate was aired again at Tuesday's Santa Cruz City Council meeting during a public hearing on the city's application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to demolish

the wing.

Council members continued the hearing to July 5 and asked for more information on alternatives to demolition.

These second thoughts have arisen just as FEMA officials are about to approve or deny the city's application for about \$1 million in earthquake repair funds, according to Jack Ness, the city's finance director. If the city waffles, or changes its mind, Ness fears the funding could be jeopardized.

"Demolition, for me, was a bridge we'd already crossed," said Ness.

However, several dozen residents almost unanimously showed up to say the building should be saved.

"It really is a fine civic building we have," said Daryl Allen, of the Historic Preservation Commission.

"Residents have heard very, very little about this project," said Joseph Bunnett of the two-story replacement.

Please see POLICE — BACK PAGE

Police wing

Continued from Page A1

City Hall, designed by C.J. Ryland, an architect recognized for his restoration of the Carmel Mission, was built in 1936.

The first city hall built for Santa Cruz, it was located on what was once the garden estate of millionaire Frederick Augustus Hihn. It features a U-shaped hall set around a landscaped courtyard with brick walks, a fountain, and low stone walls and gardens.

The wing was vacated after the Loma Prieta quake. Initially city officials thought the earthquake damage was minor, and contracted for repairs. But when the roof was opened, workers found the walls were not reinforced and that damage was more significant, said City Manager Richard Wilson. Officials decided it would not be cost effective to make repairs.

The police department has been in temporary headquarters at 320 Locust St.

Since then, city officials have pursued plans to demolish the wing and replace it with a two-story building that would be architecturally compatible. The city hoped to get \$1 million from FEMA for the work.

Demolition plans were endorsed in 1991 by the city's Historic Preservation Commission and again in January by the City Council, which voted unanimously to seek FEMA funds.

Members of the Historic Preservation Commission now say they regret that earlier vote and want to save the building.

"That was really an error," said commission member Sara Boutelle. She said the commission was "somehow maneuvered into that position" by being told demolition was a "sure thing."

Commissioners thought their role was only to comment on a replacement, said Boutelle.

Others who regret their votes include City Councilwoman Katherine Beiers. She said Tuesday she didn't realize that the council voted earlier this

year to demolish the wing. She thought she was approving further negotiations with FEMA to finance earthquake repairs.

According to Wilson, the alternative to demolition would be to build police headquarters on a city-owned parking lot on Chestnut Street, the former site of the Heiner House.

The police quarters, with an underground parking garage, and repairing the City Hall wing, would cost \$2.9 million, according to Nolte & Associates Engineers.

Replacing the wing would cost \$1.34 million, Nolte estimates, assuming the building would incorporate historic elements such as red clay roof tiles and flagstone. The Police Department would still have to be housed elsewhere, Wilson said.

Simply repairing the wing would not provide enough room for police, which was already cramped in the police wing and has since grown, said Wilson. Nor could the building, even repaired, meet current earthquake safety standards, which are more stringent for buildings housing essential services like police, he said.

Those who want to save the wing maintain it is significant, historically and architecturally.

"What is at stake here is one of the most important buildings in Santa Cruz," said Matthew Thompson, a Santa Cruz architect.

The building is eligible to be designated of national historical significance, according to historic commissioner Anthony Kirk. It is the first city hall built for Santa Cruz, designed by an architect recognized for his restoration of the Carmel Mission, he said.

Preservationists argued that a two-story building would dominate the old City Hall, which is an outstanding Monterey colonial style building.

Ness said FEMA would require as a condition of demolition that a replacement building incorporate many of the historic features, but that the design make clear what's new.