

Hotel plan appealed to state panel

Hotels & Boarding
houses
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SANTA CRUZ » A historic preservation advocate filed a last-minute appeal Thursday of the Santa Cruz City Council's approval of the La Bahia Hotel.

Ross Eric Gibson, a Westside resident acting on behalf of the La Bahia Coalition, argues in his appeal to the state Coastal Commission, the deadline for which was Thursday, that the developer failed to hew closely to guidelines in the city's beach area plan that call for greater preservation of the 1926 Spanish Colonial landmark.

Gibson says the partial restoration approved by the council doesn't go far enough to maintain character defining features

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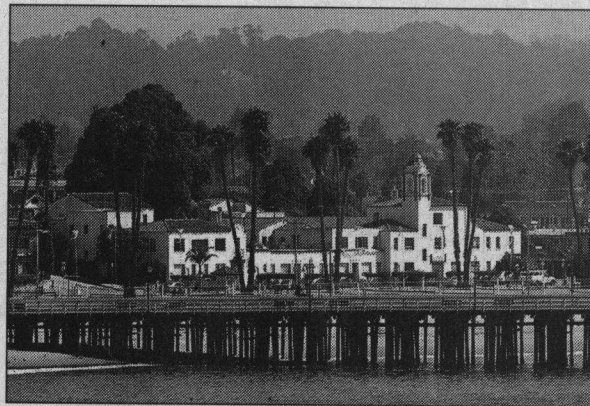
Hotel

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of the apartment building that qualifies for the National Historic Register. The council found that creation of a high-quality conference hotel in the beach area and the year-round economic value that would bring to a town that feasts on summer tourism were overriding factors to consider when weighing historic demolition.

"They chose token preservation as opposed to actual preservation that retains a significant portion of the building," Gibson said Friday. "I just want them to follow the (beach) plan guidelines as they were laid out."

Developer Craig French could not be reached Friday to comment. The property, used as a 44-unit apartment complex, is owned by the Santa Cruz Seaside Co.



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Historic preservation advocates filed an appeal of the La Bahia Hotel plans approved by the City Council recently.

French Resources Group's vision for La Bahia, the third iteration of renovation plans in the past dozen years, saves the southeastern portion of the building containing an iconic bell tower, which will be refurbished. The greater part of the remaining structure would come down in favor of a new building containing a 165-

room hotel with a restaurant, conference space and day spa.

Previous developers of a full historic restoration abandoned the project and a second firm's plans, which saved far less of the building, were shot down by the Coastal Commission because it was too tall. There also was strong neighborhood and union opposition,

ON THE NET

To view the La Bahia Coalition's appeal to the state Coastal Commission, visit santacruzsentinel.com and click on this story.

which did not happen with the current project though it is subject to appeal because it is located within the state coastal zone.

Karen Geisler, a program analyst with the Coastal Commission, said staff will research the issue and set a hearing, though it would not be before November.

Mayor Lynn Robinson said she hopes the commission finds the project, which was approved by the city's Planning and Historic Preservation commissions, has merit.

"We had three different decision-making bodies weigh in and ultimately a unanimous vote by the City Council," Robinson said. "We have fully vetted the project, and I feel the merits are very strong."