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# Santa Cruz HISTORIC BUILDINGS seeks study of Flatiron

## Council votes to fund renovation assessment

By Paul Rogers  
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The Santa Cruz City Council will get an outside opinion about whether demolishing its oldest surviving downtown landmark, the 1859 Flatiron building, is inevitable.

After months of outcry from historic preservationists, council members voted unanimously Tuesday night to hire structural engineer Loring Wyllie of San Francisco to complete an independent assessment of the building's chances for renovation.

The Flatiron, a triangular brick building at the head of the Pacific Garden Mall, suffered extensive damage in the Loma Prieta earthquake and remains boarded up.

Named because it resembles an antique clothing iron, the two-story Flatiron holds particular significance to local history.

Not only was it a county courthouse in the 1860s and the first brick building in downtown Santa Cruz, but its adjacent wing also housed the city's first Wells Fargo stagecoach station. Just before the quake, it was home to the Teacup restaurant and Plaza Bakery.

The Flatiron's owners, the family of Councilman Louis Rittenhouse, say it is beyond repair and should be torn down to make way for a new, four-story building.

The Rittenhouses applied for a demolition permit in July, claiming that restoration would be prohibitively expensive and impractical, since much of the original structure had been altered by previous owners.

But preservationists, still dejected over the demolitions of the 1920s-era St. George Hotel and the landmark Cooper House, protested.

"The Flatiron building has seen it all," wrote C. Brillio College Professor Sandy Lydon in a recent political newsletter. "The rally to mourn the death of Abraham Lincoln, the celebration at the end of the Civil War. . . the many rallies calling for the end of the Vietnam War.

"Now they want to tear down the last piece of Santa

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## Council seeks outside opinion on saving Flatiron building

### ■ LANDMARK

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Cruz's downtown retail architecture — the linchpin of Santa Cruz's downtown business and historic core."

Under the council vote Tuesday night — from which Rittenhouse abstained — the city will split Wyllie's \$5,500 engineering fee with the Rittenhouse family.

Wyllie's report, due out in the spring, will be reviewed by the council before it makes a final decision.

Wyllie has done similar work on other contested Santa Cruz structures. Earlier this year, when developer Ruben Fuentes wanted to demolish the historic Trust Building, he reported it could be saved without significant expense, a position that Fuentes later adopted.

By contrast, after inspecting the damaged Pogonip Clubhouse last October, he took the opposite opinion.

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In an interview Tuesday, Councilman Rittenhouse said preserving the Flatiron would cost \$225 a foot, or about \$1 million. Building a new building three times the size would cost \$93 a square foot, or about \$2 million, he said.

Rittenhouse said the only original part left is brickwork on the second floor. The rest, he said, was remodeled, torn out or plastered over at the turn of the century.

He said he has offered critics such as Lydon a tour, but they haven't accepted the offer.

Tuesday, Rittenhouse's position was given support by a key downtown rebuilding official.

"I believe his representations are accurate," said Santa Cruz Redevelopment Director Ceil Cirillo. "The building has been reworked so many times over the years that I'm not sure there is a lot of historic integrity left."