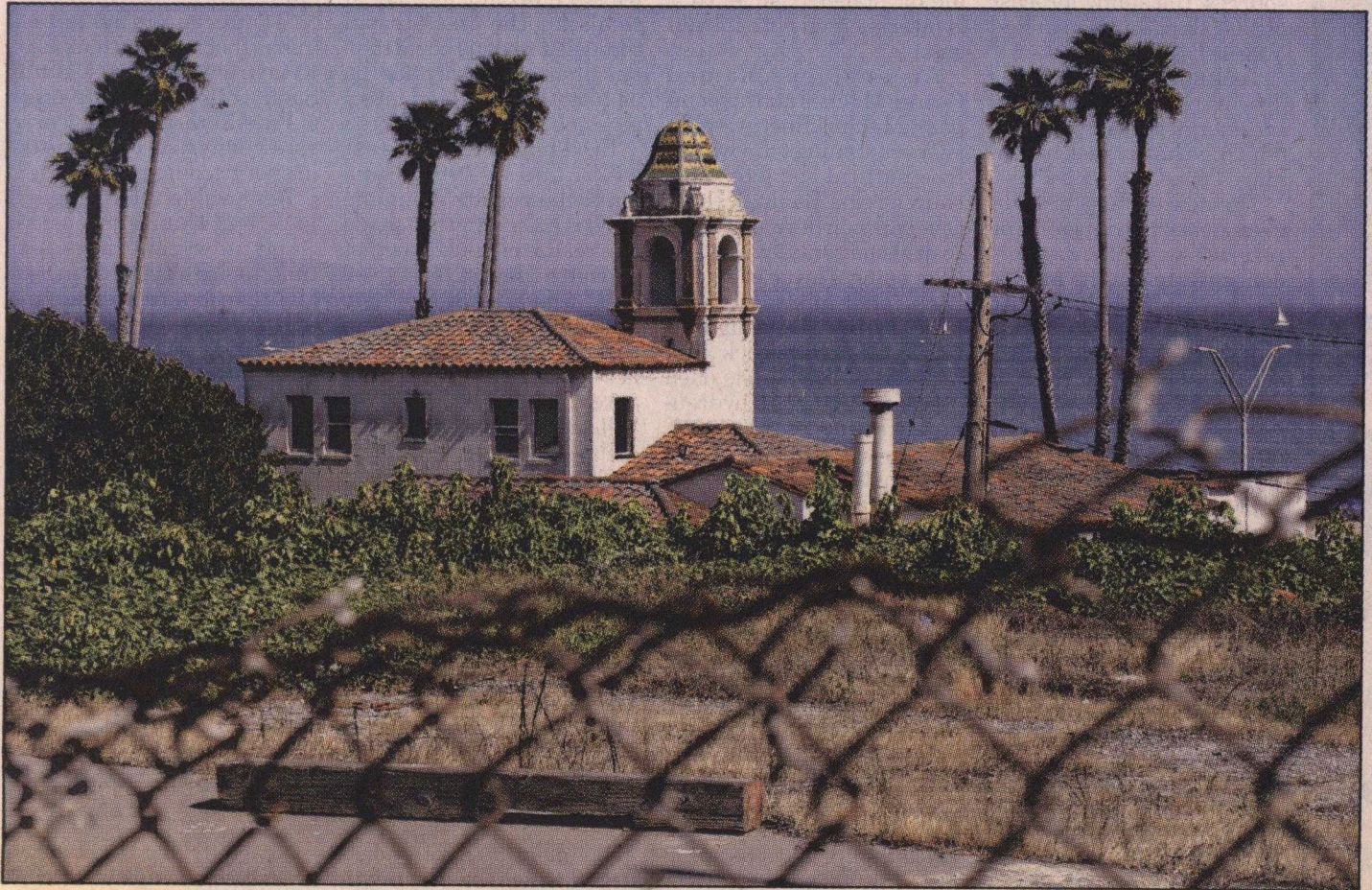


Another chance for historic La Bahia

Santa Cruz Seaside Co. officials submit new plans for hotel project



MATTHEW HINTZ/SENTINEL

La Bahia's iconic bell tower is seen through a vacant space behind the building at the corner of First and Main streets.

By J.M. BROWN

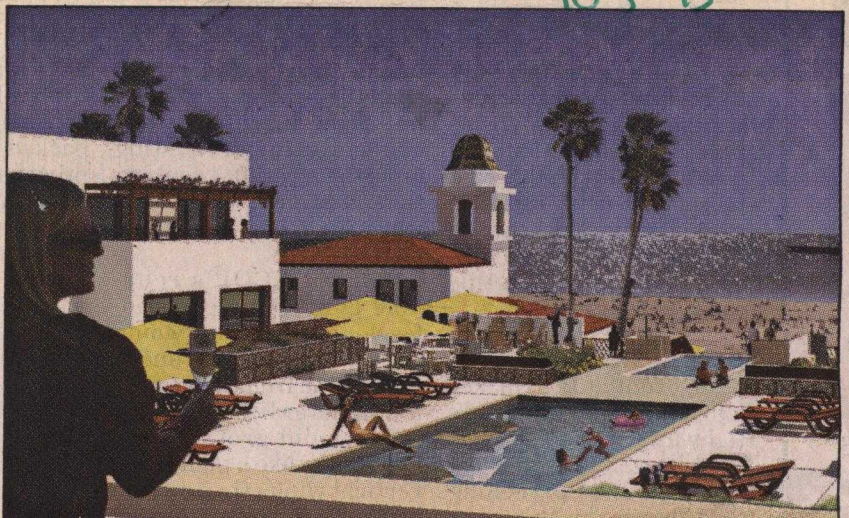
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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz Seaside Co. representatives have submitted new plans for remaking the landmark La Bahia apartment building into a four-star 165-room hotel — one designed to fit within existing zoning and retain much more of the historic seaside structure than earlier proposals.

Persistent opposition by organized labor, historic preservationists and neighbors contributed to a bruising defeat before the California Coastal Commission in 2011. That iteration of the project was doomed by insufficient historic preservation and height that exceeded regulations.

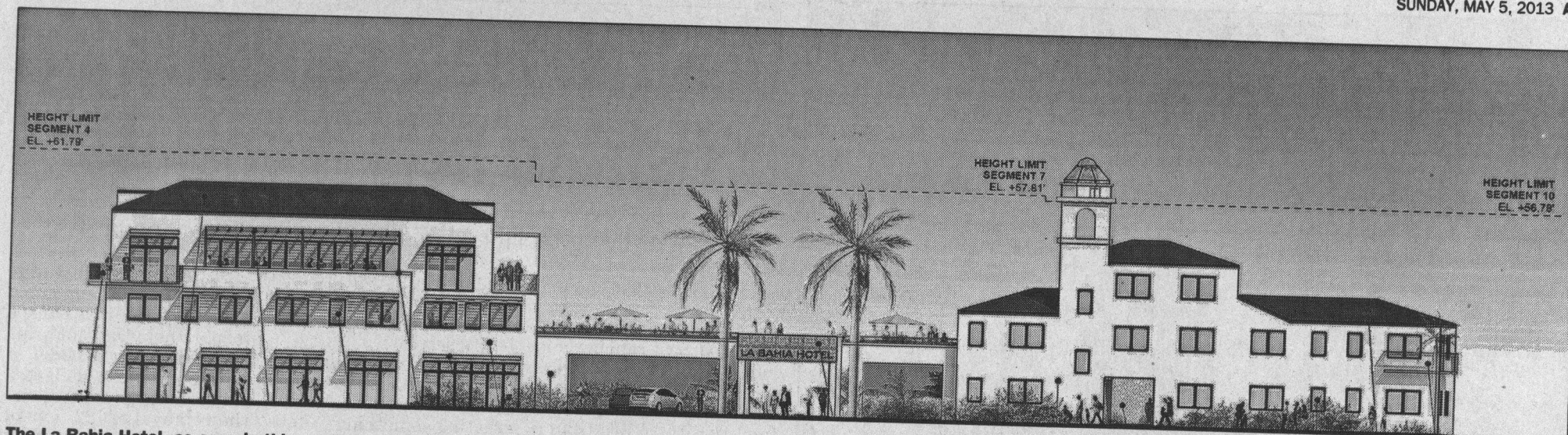
The revised Beach Street proposal, shepherded by Santa Cruz property consultant Craig French, calls for saving an iconic bell tower and restoring the entire east side

SEE LA BAHIA ON A3



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A rendering of a view of the iconic La Bahia Hotel bell tower and Monterey Bay from a guest room above the pool deck in the proposed hotel project.



The La Bahia Hotel, as seen in this rendering of the front elevation, would save the historic bell tower and accompanying structure to the right and offer retail space over, and restaurant and conference space in a new building to the left.

FRENCH RESOURCES GROUP/CONTRIBUTED

LA BAHIA

Continued from A1

of the 1926 Spanish Colonial structure. The remainder of the withering property, neglected for years as demolition plans awaited approval, would be torn down and reconstructed to include a restaurant and conference center above retail shops overlooking Monterey Bay.

Mayor Hilary Bryant said she is pleased the Seaside Co. is taking another shot. She said a high-quality hotel at the site would connect the Beach Boardwalk and Main Beach areas to the ongoing revitalization near the Municipal Wharf, where new businesses and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary center are located near renovated hotels.

"This is a prime piece of real estate right in the heart of the beach and tourist area," Bryant said. "As a tourist coming to Santa Cruz, looking at what is currently there doesn't send the message we want to send."

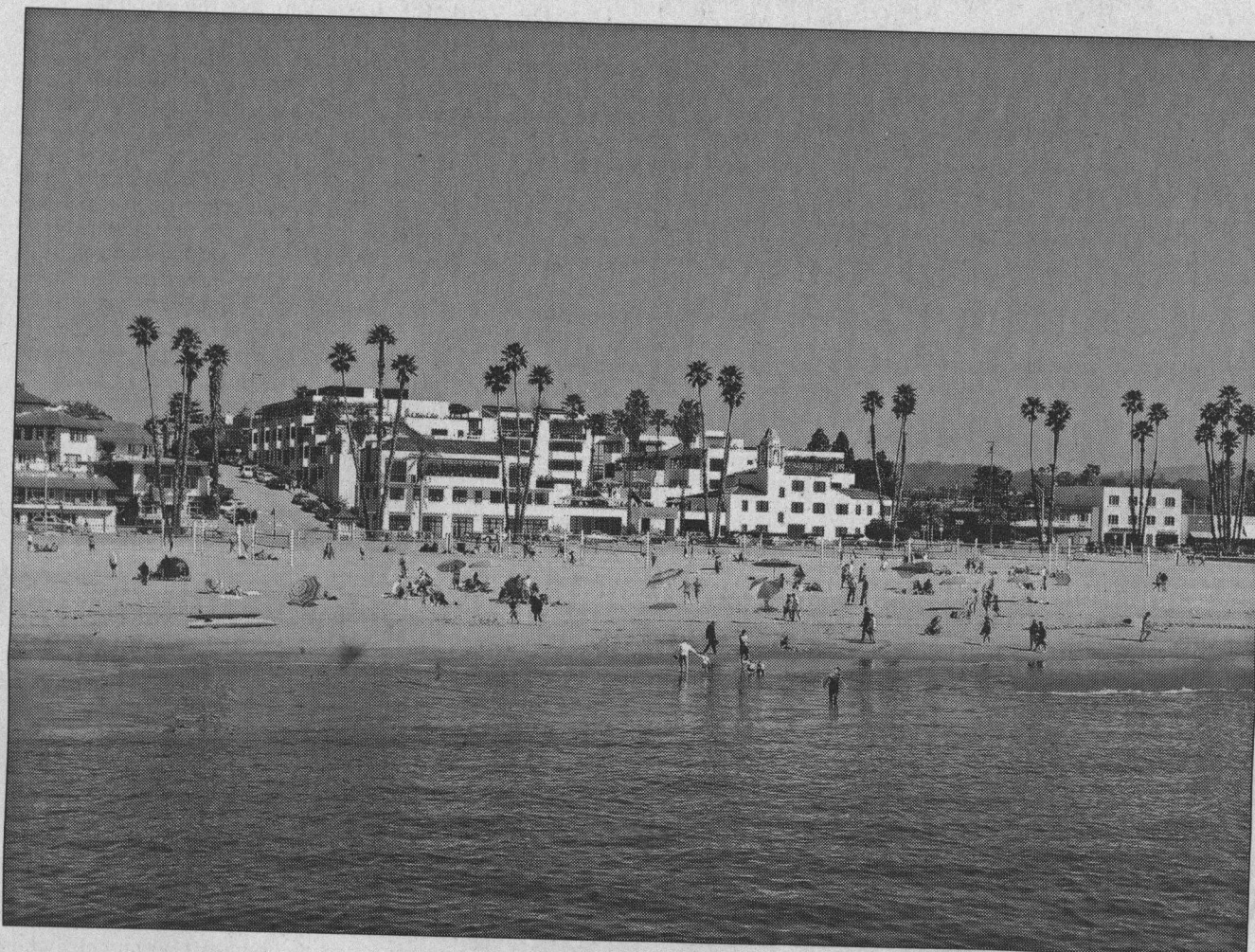
According to plans shared with the Sentinel on Friday, the 198,000-square-foot hotel would contain 32 percent more rooms than the 2011 project. All will be guest rooms, as opposed to the 2011 project, which was designed as a condo-hotel featuring eye-popping suites at the top designed to facilitate financing.

French, a former Redtree Properties executive who opened his own firm last year, said early estimates put costs at \$40 million to \$50 million, higher than the \$28 million for the 2011 project. He is seeking investors who may be interested in operating the hotel, which could take up to two years to build.

Eighty percent of the rooms will have full or partial ocean views, with some of the most expensive offering large private decks and views of the sleek pool. Near the grand lobby, there are plans to replicate internal courtyards featured in the original building, which is listed on the city's list of historic sites. Parking will be contained onsite underground.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Like any high-profile project, the hotel faces a number of hurdles.



The view of the proposed La Bahia Hotel from the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf.

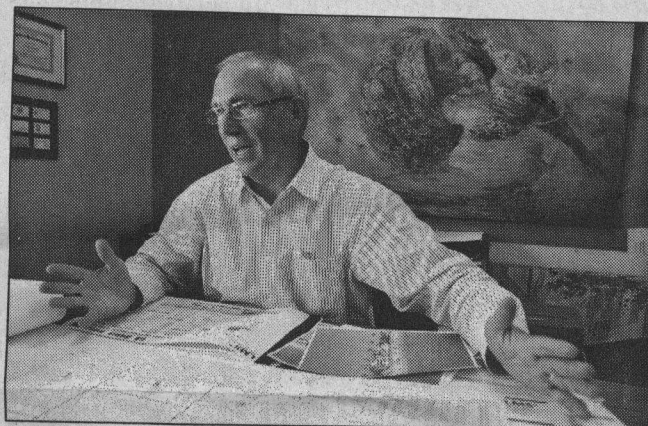
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The city must approve a new environmental impact report and make findings consistent with its own coastal plans and historic regulations. Zoning entitlements, coastal permits and design and development permits will be scrutinized by the city's Historic Preservation and Planning commissions before coming to the City Council for consideration.

If approved by the council, the project would only reach the Coastal Commission if it appealed.

Planning Director Juliana Rebagliati said her office is just beginning to evaluate the plans, but she said she anticipates a simpler process than before because the new project appears to fall within a 43-foot maximum height outlined in zoning regulations. Also, she said some environmental analysis can be borrowed from the previous project.

Built on a slope rising to its highest point at the northwest corner of Main and First streets, the hotel will stand three to four floors high in the back. The 2011 plans exceeded height limits



Craig French talks over the revised renderings of La Bahia on Friday afternoon.

MATTHEW HINTZ/SENTINEL

by 1.5 stories, and the state commission denied a local plan amendment request to create what critics dubbed "spot zoning."

"There were a lot of lessons learned, and it seemed prudent to take the lessons learned and continue plowing the row," French said of the previous project's failure. "If they had abandoned it at that time, it would have been unfortunate."

Seaside Co., which owns La Bahia and the Boardwalk, was in a long partnership with Barry Swenson Builder

to revamp the building. The developer is not involved in the new plans.

Jesse Nickell, Swenson's former pointman for La Bahia, couldn't be reached for comment late Friday but had said previously that efforts to continue working with Seaside Co. were unsuccessful.

Kris Reyes, a spokesman for Seaside Co., said the company didn't want to give up after the Coastal Commission defeat.

"We never wavered in our commitment to a world-class

hotel in the beach area," he said. "We know the Santa Cruz community supports our effort and we look forward to delivering a hotel the entire community can be proud of."

TORTURED HISTORY

The majority of citizens who testified for more than two hours before the Coastal Commission in 2011 supported the plans, saying economic investment on a blighted property was desperately needed. But labor groups fought the project because Swenson was unwilling to use all union workers.

Neighbors who were upset about blocked views sued the city unsuccessfully over its environmental review. Don Webber, a

AT A GLANCE

LA BAHIA HOTEL

ADDRESS: 215 Beach St.

SIZE: 198,000 square feet

TOTAL FLOORS: Six (with three mostly underground)

ROOMS: 165

PARKING SPOTS: 210 (in underground garage)

AMENITIES: Conference space, full-service restaurant, and pool

OWNER: La Bahia LLC, connected to Santa Cruz Seaside Co.

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Craig French, French Resources Group

ARCHITECT: Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects, San Francisco

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Joni L. Janecki, Santa Cruz

First Street resident who led the lawsuit, said Friday he had not yet seen the new plans.

Former Santa Cruz County Supervisor Mark Stone — who left the commission and is now in the state Assembly — was among the commissioners who voted no in 2011. Like others, he expressed concerns about the precedent-setting special zoning and lacking provisions for saving historic resources.

"I think a project like this can be done in the framework that exists," Stone said at the time.

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