

City takes over ownership of Cooper House's bricks

EARTHQUAKE '89 - City of Santa Cruz

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SANTA CRUZ — For the time being, city Public Works Director Larry Erwin is king of the downtown brick pile.

"I'm assuming ownership of it until it's settled," Erwin said, referring to the controversy over who owns the brick from demolished downtown buildings, and who has the rights to profit from salvage.

Earlier this week, Graniterock had begun hauling away yellow brick rubble from the fallen landmark Cooper House, after making a deal with owner Jay Paul.

But city officials have learned that the city or the federal government may have salvage rights when a city-ordered disaster demolition is being paid for by federal, state and local governments.

Erwin said he has told Graniterock manager Dave Busch to set the bricks aside while the city attorney determines who is the rightful owner.

Much of the broken brick and rubble has been hauled to the city landfill.

Graniterock and the city also backed out of a deal, approved by the City Council last week, calling for Graniterock to lease a $\frac{1}{4}$ -acre piece of city property next to the city's homeless shelter for \$1 a

month. Graniterock planned to clean the bricks there and stack them on pallets for sale.

The salvage arrangement, and especially the company's virtually free use of city land, drew sharp criticism from Graniterock's competitors.

City Councilman Don Lane said the council "authorized the lease," but then it wasn't "executed." After rethinking it, the city decided to call off the lease, Lane said.

Brown, the assistant city manager, said calling off the lease was a "mutual decision" by Graniterock and the city.

Busch said his company had ended up not using the land anyway because recent rains had made it too muddy for heavy trucks to enter.

Busch said he did not know who legally owns bricks after a government-funded demolition. But, he said, it is common practice for salvagers to take the bricks from such buildings. Many companies, for example, received bricks from fallen downtown Coalinga buildings after the strong earthquake there several years ago. Busch said he believed Central Home Supply in Santa Cruz had acquired bricks there.

But Central Home Supply owner

Rick Santee said his company tried, but was not able to buy bricks there. Instead, he said, the Coalinga bricks were snapped up by Los Angeles firms. Santee said he bought 100,000 bricks from Watsonville when the city tore down the 200 block of Main Street in 1987 to make way for redevelopment.

Many local residents have been calling for the Cooper House's golden bricks to be saved and used to build a memorial to victims and buildings destroyed by the magnitude 7.1 temblor of Oct. 17.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said many people have also suggested to her that the bricks should be auctioned off or sold as souvenirs to raise money for earthquake relief or restoration of the badly damaged Pacific Garden Mall.

The Downtown Association will be left to consider whether a memorial should be built, Wormhoudt said.

She said residents have expressed a strong attachment to the Cooper House.

"It was a downtown icon, if there was one," she said. Now, "we need to create new icons." The Town Clock could be a new symbol for the downtown, and other buildings worthy of admiration remain in the mall area. "We've had our losses, but we haven't lost everything."