

# Hotel project moves forward

*Hotels*  
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✓ SANTA CRUZ — A new luxury hotel on Beach Street could be closer to reality, as the city's Planning Commission last week unanimously approved the plans with conditions that developers said they, for the most part, can meet.

"They seem to be pretty workable," said Jesse Nickell, vice president of Barry Swenson Builder, which hopes to build a new, 125-room hotel where the current La Bahia apartments stand across from Main Beach.

"They want to help us make things better, why would you not take that help?" Nickell said.

At issue is plans for a new hotel on the site of the historic but crumbling La Bahia apartments. While the lot has long been slated for a new hotel, controversy has swirled over whether the current plans preserve enough of the original building, are too high or use enough union labor in construction and operation.

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**JESSE NICKELL**, Barry Swenson Builder

The drawings under consideration now are the third attempt since 2007 to compromise between what community members think is a good fit and what developers believe will earn a profit. A public hearing on the plans will be March 31 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.

While the Planning Commission might have reached a plan it can accept, others are expected to argue against plans to build parts of the hotel one story taller than city code allows, or that developers refuse to use exclusively union labor.

Still, last week, the plans went before the Historic Preservation and Planning commissions, which make recommendations to the City Council. The Historic Preservation Commission unanimously rejected the latest drawings, but the group made eight recommendations that, if included, could garner its favor. Those included establishing a citizen commission to hammer out final details of the hotel, maintaining more of the historic facade and preserving the original courtyard designs.

The Planning Commission unanimously approved the plans with the eight recommendations from the Historic Preservation Commission.

"They're suggesting, basically, more accurate historic reconstruction of portions of the building," said city Planner Don Lauritson, who works with the historic commission.

Nickell said his biggest issue is whether to maintain the building's front facade as the commissions ask. Barry Swenson hopes to place the main entryway on Beach Street, Nickell said.

"If you can't find our front door, we're going to say no to that," Nickell said.

The City Council will make the final decision on whether to

that the plans have come a long way.

Councilwoman Lynn Robinson did not commit to how she will vote on the project. But she did say that "it's clear that (Barry Swenson Builder) ha(s) responded to community response. That's what's really been changing this project."

