

Hotel at La Bahia up for consideration

Hotels and Boarding Houses
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Plans to turn the wind-blown and faded La Bahia apartment complex into a swank, beachside hotel face City Council scrutiny

SANTA CRUZ Tuesday night.

After three years of reviewing plans, council members are expected to vote on whether to give initial approval for developer Barry Swenson Builder and Boardwalk owner, Seaside Co., to begin building a 118-room hotel with condominiums in the Beach Area.

The upscale facility would take root in a 76-year-old landmark at 215 Beach St. — a structure distinguished by its Spanish courtyard and tile tower, but a victim of blight and decay.

"We need something to spruce up the community there," said Jim Hanlon, a project manager at Barry Swenson Builders. "And the architecture (of the new hotel) is going to be in the likeness of what's there now."

The La Bahia complex currently houses UC Santa Cruz students and seasonal workers at the Boardwalk. The residents have been promised comparable housing at a nearby development when the La Bahia remodel begins.

The project was signed off by the city Planning Department last month. The proposal calls for a 110,000-square-foot structure in total, with an underground parking garage.

But not everyone is completely behind the plan, including a number of neighbors in the seaside community.

"I'm in favor of the project, I just hope it doesn't go through as is," said Dan Alper, who lives across the street from the La Bahia on First Avenue.

Alper, who said he is joined by dozens of other families, worries about traffic and noise, the elimination of ocean views and the aesthetic burden of an unsightly "monolith."

But many city leaders have spoken in favor of rejuvenating the site and think that a luxury hotel may be a way to do this.

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"I'm very supportive," said Councilmember Scott Kennedy. He claimed that the developers have been receptive to community concerns and that new taxes brought in through a hotel would be good for the city.

Some estimates suggest that as much as \$500,000 could be added to the city's cash-poor coffers.

The issue is scheduled for deliberation at the council's 7 p.m. session Tuesday, at the council chamber, 809 Center St., Santa Cruz.

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