

CITY HALL

Replacement of police wing to be weighed today by council

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON

Special to the Mercury News

The police wing of the historic Santa Cruz City Hall was constructed in 1936, and it was the only part built without reinforcement. The wing has been abandoned since the 1989 Loma Prieta quake.

With \$1 million in FEMA funds available, the city council today is scheduled to consider demolishing and replacing this wing with a wider two-story wing.

In the event of demolition, the state Historic Preservation Office requires any replacement to be a modern interpretation of the old structure — although a 1965 addition behind City Hall looks more like a 1960s space-



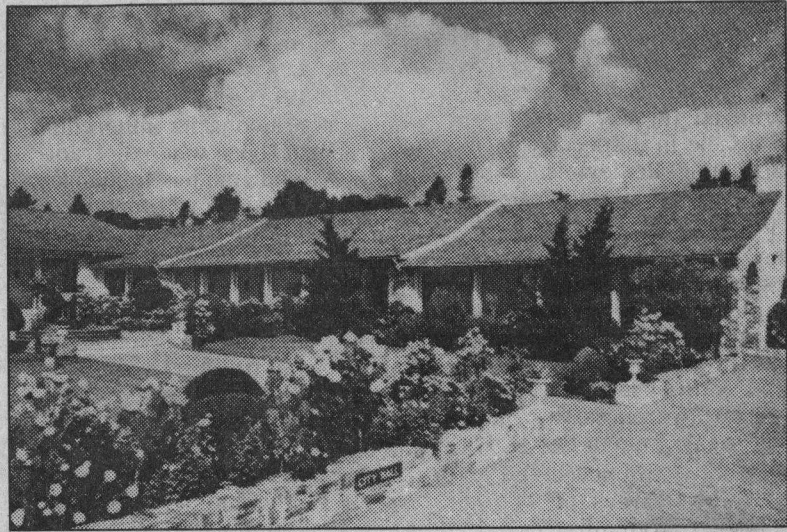
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age motel.

City Manager Dick Wilson told the board of the County Historic Trust that the FEMA funds were not conditional to the police wing's demolition, allowing the department to build.

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ROSS ERIC GIBSON COLLECTION

Santa Cruz City Hall, finished in 1937, reflects historical accuracy.

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History, space issues in police wing decision

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where it wishes. Indeed, both FEMA and the state Historic Preservation Office indicated a preference toward preservation, based on the building's historical significance.

Edna Kimbro calls the City Hall a nationally recognized landmark, and "... the ideal of what one expects of a small (town) California city hall," to quote David Gebhard's state landmarks book.

Designer C.J. Ryland used a level of historic accuracy that he developed in restoring the Carmel mission. Most of the mission is a replica of long vanished buildings but is designed to look like it had always been there. He designed the Monterey and Santa Cruz city halls in the Monterey Colonial Style exclusive to this bay. He felt they should depict the ancient origins of these communities, in the style of a provincial governor's mansion. Some feel Santa Cruz got the better design.

It was constructed by George Loorz, who had just finished six years as superintendent for the construction of Hearst Castle in San Simeon. These men were scrupulously faithful to the his-



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toric styles in which they dealt, counterfeiting an ambiance of antiquity. The police wing was based on the 1861 David Jacks Adobe near Monterey, and elements of the courtyard remind one of Carmel's Casa Boronda and Ranchito Pio Pico. A large new wing dominating the scale of the courtyard in post-modern overtones would compromise the architectural ethic with which this landmark was constructed.

The City Historic Preservation Commission has been repeatedly misrepresented as approving the demolition. Both times it was asked to support demolition, the commission reiterated that its first preference was preservation. It voted that it would only approve demolition upon approval of a replacement or reconstruction project,

which it has never done.

A two-story police wing still would not have the 30,000 square feet the city needs. A 1977 city report identifies a Locust Street lot west of the police wing as an expansion site. Combining a police annex and reconstructed police wing yields up to 35,088 square feet.

But if a 30,600-square-foot police building were constructed at the City Hall parking lot, the old police wing wouldn't have to be reconstructed to the more expensive Essential Services Code. It would only have to meet the less costly Historic Building Code as a separate project.

The city general plan, completed in November 1993, lists City Hall as one of the city-owned properties of historic interest, requiring protection and/or rehabilitation.

Historical preservationists and leading architects packed City Hall last Tuesday to oppose a two-story police wing replacement, and architect Matthew Thompson is independently producing a more thorough study of the parking lot site.

City Finance Director Jack Ness informed the city council that rejecting demolition would mean starting the design process all over again. Councilman

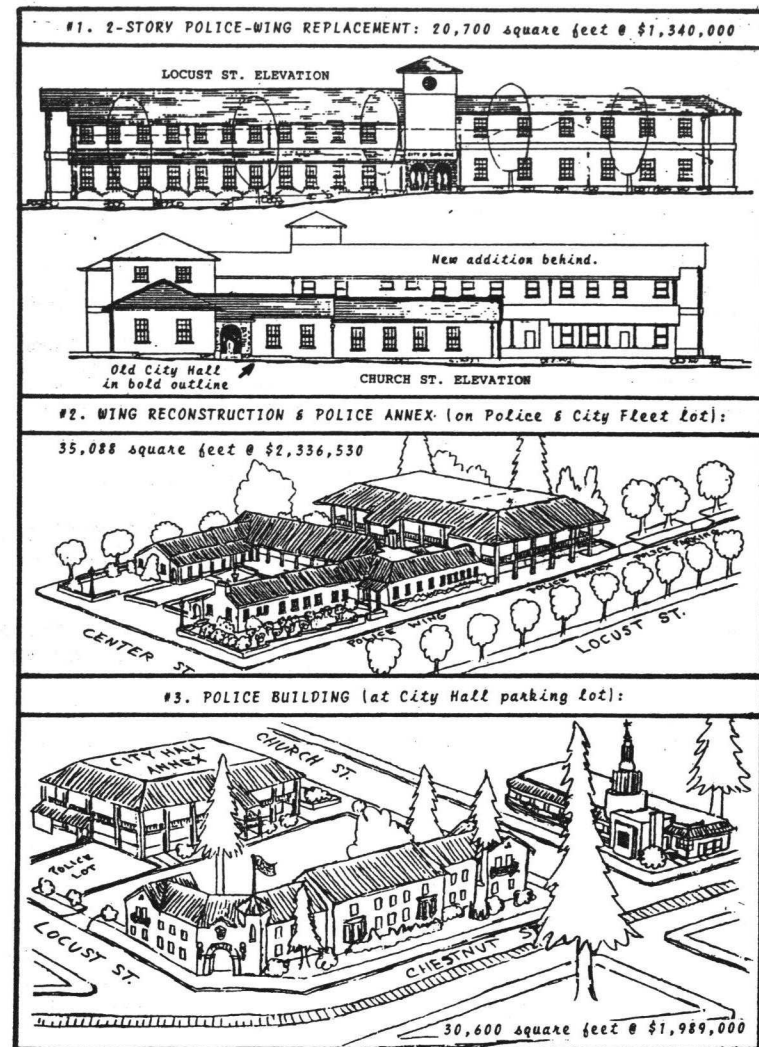
Louie Rittenhouse said, "What's to prevent us from using the new police wing design on the parking lot site?"

Ness told the council that downtown neighbors would be outraged if a police building was constructed in the City Hall parking lot.

In a letter, FEMA said it had the impression public hearings had been held on the police wing demolition, and the public wasn't interested. The city council acknowledged that no formal public hearings or publicity have been given this project, now three years along. Mike Rotkin, speaking for the council majority, felt it was counterproductive at this late date to inform the public on this matter with a special hearing. He said the council already knew everything it needed to know, and that public opinions would merely be repetitive.

So today's 7 p.m. session of the council will be the last chance the public has to comment, before the project is handed over to FEMA for finalization.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.



Sketches show three proposals for Santa Cruz police building.

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