

# Westside hotel proposal rejected

*Hotels and Boarding House*  
Planning Commission  
gives unanimous 'no'

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SANTA CRUZ — The city's planning commission on Thursday unanimously shot down plans for a new Westside hotel off Highway 1, saying the applicant was unprepared and the hotel was not the appropriate first impression for guests entering the northern gateway to Santa Cruz.

"It's just a big block stucco building, three stories tall, which is just not that attractive," said Commissioner Scott Daly. "It looks like a nice hotel you'd place in the Valley or somewhere like Fairfield."

In addition, Daly said, the applicants did not provide color renderings of what the hotel would look like at its proposed location, and refused to accommodate commissioner requests to redesign the lodge.

But Paresh Patel with San Jose-based Lotus Management, which hoped to open the Fairfield Inn hotel franchise, said he did everything city staff asked him to do and considered commissioners' demands excessive.

"We thought we had met all the requirements by the city," Patel said. "But for some reason the Planning Commission had something else on their mind and it didn't go well."

The Planning Commission makes recommendations to the City Council, which will consider the hotel next month.

The 86-room, 50-foot-tall hotel was proposed for 1.2 acres of an empty lot a block west of Western Drive, north of Mission Street Extension and south of Highway 1. The land is zoned for industrial use, and the hotel would be the first major chain in the neighborhood.

Daly said commissioners were not necessarily opposed to a new Westside hotel, but this one is not it.

"There is an opportunity and definite potential," Daly said.

The hotel's location would be appealing to cycling tourists who could easily ride to Natural Bridges, Wilder Ranch and Highway 1, he said. It also would be close to

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UC Santa Cruz, Long Marine Lab and other popular Santa Cruz destinations.

But a "Fairfield Inn" sign, he said, is not the first impression visitors should have of Surf City. In addition, without proper renderings it was difficult for commissioners to tell how the hotel would affect views for neighbors across the road or blend into the neighborhood.

Paul Zeck, who hopes to open a Fairfield Inn franchise in Capitola, said he was shocked the hotel was rejected but understood the commission's reasoning.

Santa Cruz faced a \$9.2 million deficit this year, and the new hotel would raise about \$207,000 in hotel taxes annually, based on 60 percent occupancy and a \$110 nightly rate.

"I would never have thought in a million years that they would shoot down a hotel project," Zeck said.

However, Zeck agreed

that a cookie-cutter hotel is not appropriate for Santa Cruz. He is working with Fairfield Inn corporate staff to custom design the Capitola lodge to better capture the flavor of that town, he said. His plans were approved by the Capitola Planning Commission last month, and are awaiting approval from the City Council on Thursday. If approved, the hotel would be on 41st Avenue at Brommer Street.

"We think it's going to be the nicest Fairfield Inn in the entire country," Zeck said. "We know what our customers want, and they won't settle for a typical suburban, set-along-the-highway box hotel."

Lotus Management, a family-run company, also plans to build a new courtyard Marriott hotel on Riverside Avenue in Beach Flats. Plans for that hotel were approved last fall, but work has been delayed until at least the end of the year because financing is hard to get in the current recession, representatives said. Fairfield Inn is a branch of Marriott hotels.