

# Council votes hotel down

*EARTHQUAKE '89 - City of Santa Cruz*

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council voted late Tuesday night to grant demolition permits to bring down the St. George Hotel.

The vote to allow demolition and to grant permits to build a new building passed on a 6-1 margin, with Councilwoman Katherine Beiers opposing.

The decision came after months of public debate over the future of the 96-year-old hotel, which because of its dangerous condition has kept the entire northern end of the Pacific Garden Mall fenced off since the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Hundreds of people jammed the council chamber and spilled out into the courtyard to take part in the

final round. Many pressed against open windows to try to hear what was going on inside.

Business owners wore pink signs reading "Rebuild Downtown." The signs carried a drawing of the St. George tower in a circle with a slash through it.

Preservationists wore signs declaring "History and People Above Profits."

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said at the start of the hearing that unlike other planning issues following the earthquake, there would be no way the community could reach a consensus on the St. George Hotel.

"No amount of searching is going to establish common ground," she said.

Preservationists may still have

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## St. George

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one more card to play in their fight to save the old hotel. Claiming a decision to grant demolition permits without an environmental impact report would violate the state's environmental quality act, preservationists have for weeks been talking about a lawsuit.

They could seek an injunction to stay demolition, which, according to City Attorney John Barisone, could delay the process for a year or more.

Owner Barry Swenson's representatives said Tuesday night that the decision to seek to tear the hotel down was not made lightly. Bruce Moore said there are three insurmountable problems: Severe engineering problems, life-safety concerns for workers who would have to try to shore up the dangerous building and economic constraints.

The cost of repairing the hotel, he said, would cost \$1.9 million more than rebuilding and, Moore said, the results cannot be guaranteed. The federal government has

announced it would not help fund repairs because the cost is greater than building a new building. Architect Matthew Thompson told preservationists that nearly all of the facade would have to be replaced one way or the other. Even if the building were to be repaired, he said, everything that could be seen from the street would be new.

He has drawn plans for what he calls "interpretive reconstruction," a three-story building with retail stores on the bottom and two floors of affordable housing above.

An engineer supporting rehabilitation questioned the extent of damage and cost of repairs. "I believe that the design of repairs will not be complex," said Nels Roselund, a structural engineer from Pasadena.

Others favoring saving the hotel argued that a decision to demolish the building would send a message about future historic preservation in the city.

Speaking for the council majority, John Laird said the issue of historic preservation was "outweighed in a very painful

equation."

Joe Ghio said the issue to him was to get a safe-and-sound replacement building. Jane Yokoyama said her "breaking line" was ensuring that even-better affordable housing be created at the site.

Don Lane said his emotions told him to vote to save the hotel. But, he agreed with Laird that practical considerations were overriding.

"This is not like the gut-wrenching decisions that had to be made right after the earthquake," said Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, in a reference to the demolition of the Cooper House.

"This was a thoughtful decision made after a lot of public discussion," she said. "This was an important community debate. There is no easy way to deal with this, but I feel the council is in the best position it can be because of good, thoughtful testimony."

Beiers said she had prepared a speech supporting demolition, but after hearing the final round of testimony felt she had to vote for "what feels right," and that was preserving the St. George.