

✓ St. George *HISTORIC BUILDINGS* knockdown put on hold

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1-10-89

SANTA CRUZ — Demolition of the venerable St. George Hotel, slated for Thursday, has been put on hold after a historic preservation group said it would block city attempts to use federal funds to pay for the job.

City Manager Dick Wilson said late Tuesday that demolition has been postponed to allow further review by the National Trust for Historical Preservation.

A representative of the private non-profit organization said the group will block city attempts to get federal reimbursement to demolish the 93-year-old hotel.

"My understanding from the owner's staff is that the city intends to use FEMA funds to conduct this demolition," wrote Kathryn Burns, director of the western regional office, in a Tuesday letter to Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt.

"The National Trust will do everything in our power to block this potential misuse of federal funds," she said.

Engineers and an attorney representing the Historical Trust are expected to visit Santa Cruz today to look at the hotel and two other downtown buildings, Burns said.

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She said she called hotel owner Barry Swenson's San Jose office Monday afternoon to arrange for another inspection of the downtown hotel, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. She was told it would be demolished beginning Thursday, Burns said.

Wilson said the demolition permit was issued last Friday. The city announced the decision in a three-line statement that said "The Barry Swenson Company did evaluate the engineering feasibility of repair, and concluded that demolition is the only practical alternative."

City Public Works Director Larry Erwin said Monday that the city had determined the structure was an imminent danger to the public and would have to be torn down. The ruling exempted the demolition from a recent state law requiring review and made it eligible for FEMA funds.

Under emergency powers granted under a disaster declaration Wilson can order the removal of a

structure if he finds it is a public safety hazard.

Wilson's emergency powers were to expire Tuesday at midnight, but the City Council Tuesday extended them until Jan. 23. The council's move was made as part of the routine consent agenda but was added at the last minute without prior announcement.

The emergency powers declaration keeps the city eligible for federal and state emergency funds, Wilson said.

Wilson said the building was declared an imminent danger because Swenson refused to repair it.

The city had previously denied Swenson's request to demolish the hotel. Swenson contends the structure cannot feasibly be made earthquake safe.

The Santa Cruz Community Housing Corp. and a San Jose non-profit housing developer have offered to buy the hotel or the land if the building is demolished to maintain low-income housing downtown, said Elisabeth Vogel, of the housing corporation.