

# Beach hotel plan draws fiery response

*Hotels & Boarding Houses*  
**SANTA CRUZ COUNCIL HEARS STRONG OPINIONS ON BOTH SIDES**

By Ken McLaughlin  
*Mercury News*

After one of the longest public hearings in Santa Cruz's history of lengthy hearings, the city council early Thursday morning ended two days of fiery, often emotional testimony over a beach-side hotel and conference center that would transform its famous beach area.

Members of hotel and construction unions, business leaders and even some leftist activists urged the council to overcome an anti-growth bias and plant a giant seed to grow the city's tourist economy. But other left-leaning Santa Cruzans and residents who live near the site asked the council to kill or scale the project back.

Wednesday night, the battle widened when opponents gained support from the regional staff of the state coastal commission. The panel has the final say on whether Santa Cruz gets its big new hotel.

"The project seems very large for the site," said Diane Landry, district manager of the commission's central coast office. "That will be the biggest issue we'll have to struggle with."

The faceoff between the all-powerful Coastal Commission and the city will decide the fate of a \$100 million plan by the city's redevelopment agency to demolish the 163-room Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, a 10-story structure once named the Dream Inn, and replace it with a modern 270-room hotel. Across the street, the city would build and own a six-level parking garage and conference center and lease it back to the hotel owners.

Tuesday night seemed to belong to supporters of the project, as dozens of Latino hotel workers, construction workers, union officials and business people came to the podium to show their support. Most carried signs saying "Yes" or "Si."

"This is not development," said Don Dietrich of Operating Engineers Union Local No. 8. "It's redevelopment."

But opponents of the project owned Wednesday night. Many were residents of the city's Westside neighborhoods who feel the traffic on West Cliff Drive — the city's jewel — will become more unbearable than it is now. They wore signs that said "Say no or go slow."



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This is the conceptual design of the conference center that would go up across from the hotel. Some residents are worried that the center and parking structure would block sunlight. Below is a beach-side view of the swimming pool of the proposed hotel.



Mayor Mike Rotkin promised the council will spend hours deliberating the issue at Tuesday's council meeting, beginning at 7 p.m. The two nights of public hearings lasted 8½ hours.

Some of the more moving testimony came from resi-

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dents of the 67-space Clear View Court, adjacent to the planned conference center and parking garage. Its 150 residents are worried that they'll be forced to breathe

car exhaust and won't get enough light because the conference center and parking structure will block sunlight.

"If this were your home, could you live with it?" asked Clear View resident Karen Griggs. "I won't have any sun — nothing but noise and mold."

Four votes on the seven-member council are needed to approve the project. But many supporters urged the council to make the vote unanimous to send a strong message to the Coastal Commission.

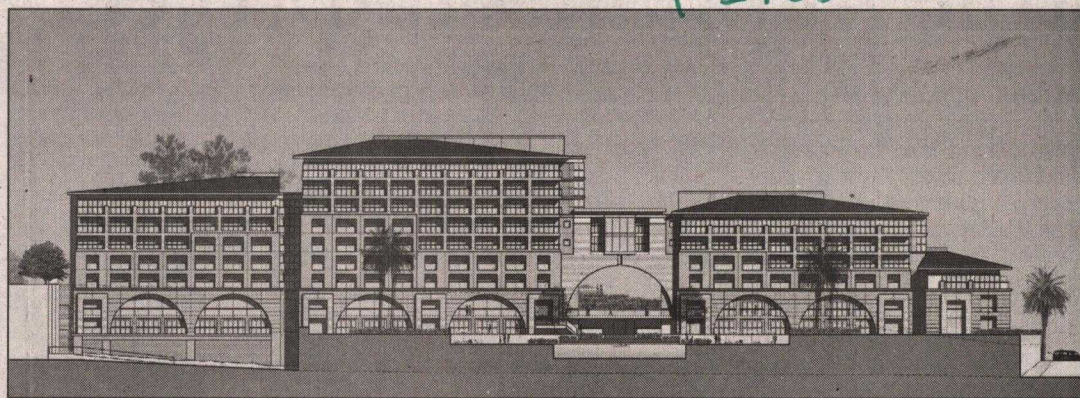
Rotkin didn't seem worried about the looming battle with the state. "People should not confuse the local staff of the Coastal Commission with the Coastal Commission," he said.

Indeed, the 12-member commission sometimes ignores the advice of its staff members. But a strong staff recommendation to deny or substantially modify a project could kill it.

"What Diane (Landry) is trying to do is give the city a heads up that they should take them seriously," Peter Douglas, director of the Coastal Commission, told the

Mercury News on Thursday.

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This is an artist's rendering of the proposed Santa Cruz hotel. The archway in the center leads to the beach. Some opponents say the project is too large for the site; backers see economic benefits.