

Rebuilding plan faces key tests

Hotels & Boarding Houses

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Historic resources, traffic will be key to review

By J.M. Brown

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SANTA CRUZ » Two city panels are scheduled to evaluate the La Bahia Hotel renovation and expansion project long eyed for beach-area revitalization plans.

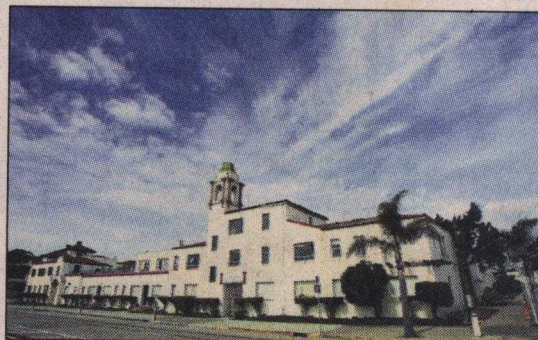
During a public hearing Thursday, the Santa Cruz Planning

Commission will undertake the proposed transformation of the historic but dilapidated La Bahia Apartments into a 165-room hotel presiding over Main Beach with a restaurant, spa and pool deck. The Historic Preservation Commission will take up the matter Aug. 13 with the City Council slated to make final determinations Sept. 9.

"The beach plan calls for a conference hotel and high-quality full-service hotel," said Planning Director Juliana Rebagliati. "This directly addresses that desire, and the design of the building is an elegant, simple design."

The proposal, drafted by French Resources Group on behalf of the property owner, Santa Cruz Seaside Co., represents the third iteration of plans to remake

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The Santa Cruz Planning and Historic Preservation commissions will review plans for the La Bahia Hotel.

DAN COYRO —
SENTINEL FILE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2014

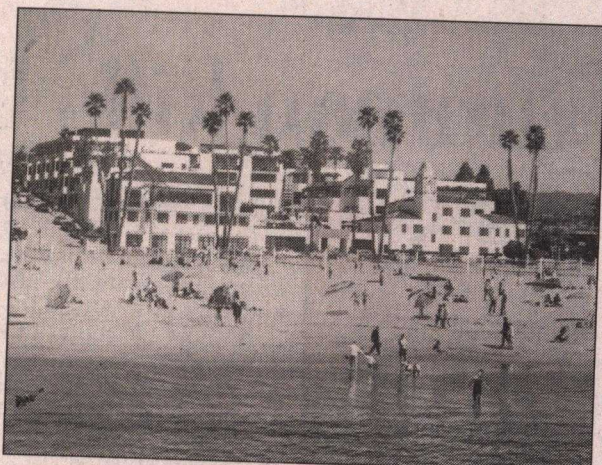
Hotel

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the 1926 Spanish Colonial Revival landmark from an apartment complex for students and Beach Boardwalk workers into a destination hotel. The first set of plans were dropped in 2003 for financial reasons, and after many years in the making, the state's Coastal Commission denied a proposal from developer Barry Swenson Builder in 2011.

Although its the largest project to date at nearly 200,000 square feet, the latest proposal for 215 Beach St. saves more of the historic structure than ever before, including an iconic bell tower and all of the building in that section of the property. However, the plans still require a slue of permits, most notably a planned development permit to accommodate a height of 43 feet in a few areas of the building, whereas zoning calls for a maximum 36 feet without the permit. Permits for historic demolition, design and proximity to coast also are required.

As part of the approval process, city leaders will be asked to certify a final environmental impact report and its findings, which in-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The proposed 165-room La Bahia hotel will save the bell tower and that wing of the historic 1926 Spanish Colonial Revival landmark, but call for demolition of other structures on the Beach Street property.

clude what planners determined to be significant impacts and overriding public benefits, namely increased hotel and sales tax revenue and improved visitor-serving accommodations.

The report cites unavoidable losses of a historic resource — the hotel is listed on the city's historic registry — but city planners have suggested requiring the developer to document the current structure with photographs, salvage parts of the building for reuse when possible and protect historic elements during construction. Also, there will be an increase in ve-

hicle traffic in key areas already considered overtaxed by state transportation officials, but the hotel will pay impact fees to fund improvements in those areas.

Don Webber, a First Street resident whose opposition to the Swenson plan strongly influenced its demise, said the current project is an improvement but is calling for less impacts on the surrounding neighborhood. He objects to allowing fewer onsite spaces than required under city rules by offering free employee bus passes and bike parking, and he wants exits from the hotel garage to

LA BAHIA HOTEL

What: Approval of recommendation to City Council for necessary permits to build a 165-room hotel at 215 Beach St., where the La Bahia Apartments are located.

When: 7 p.m. Thursday (Planning Commission) and 7:30 p.m. Aug. 13 (Historic Preservation Commission).

Where: City Council Chamber, 809 Center St.

Details: www.cityofsantacruz.com

avoid residential areas.

"I can't stress enough how important the issues of traffic and parking are to Beach Hill residents," Webber wrote the city earlier this year. "As decision makers are undoubtedly aware, this neighborhood suffers intense traffic impacts and parking shortages during the tourist season."

Developer Craig French said he believes the mitigation called for by the city can be accommodated, and noted he can't secure a deal with an operator-investor until the project is approved.

"We hope we can make some serious headway with people who have expressed interest, but we have had nothing to offer them," he said.