



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Barry Swenson Builder has lowered the height of the proposed La Bahia project on Beach Street.

La Bahia is back, again

Hotels and Boarding Houses

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SANTA CRUZ — Developers hope the third time will be a charm for a new luxury hotel across from Main Beach, as they submit their latest drawings next month for approval to build on the site of the dilapidated La Bahia apartments.

The plans will be the third set since 2007, when Barry Swenson Builder of San Jose first overhauled original plans that were approved in 2003. Now, the construction company wants to erect 125 hotel rooms on the site of the historic but crumbling La Bahia apartments, with parts of the new building standing four stories high over a parking garage.

But developers still must get past the objections of those who say the building, while scaled down from five stories, remains too tall and violates city building codes. In addition, some union workers



CONTRIBUTED

This drawing shows a birds-eye view of revised plans for a new La Bahia hotel.

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still are angry they do not have an exclusive contract to build the hotel or work in it.

Jesse Nickell, vice-president of Barry Swenson Builder, said despite the ongoing conflicts, he sees the most recent set of drawings as a compromise and is optimistic they will garner city approval.

"We've been active listeners in trying to do the right thing as a neighbor and as a developer," Nickell said. "I think the process has actually made it get better. It's still looking really good."

Significant changes

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JESSE NICKELL, Barry Swenson Builder

include scaling back the proposed hotel's tallest point by about 12 feet and producing a historic replica of the old building in one corner, among other things, although parts still stand taller than the city's 43-foot height limit.

Still, Nickell could face less opposition to the La Bahia plans than he did last summer, when members of the Monterey/Santa Cruz Counties Building

& Construction Trades Council, Unite HERE! Local 483 and other unions picketed the new building plans in front of the existing La Bahia apartments. The groups rejected Swenson's offer last year to use 65 to 75 percent union labor in exchange for their support of the project.

Ned Van Valkenburgh, vice president of the trades council, said his group will continue to oppose the project until

Barry Swenson commits to using more union labor and agrees to card check neutrality for future hotel workers.

Card check neutrality allows employees to form a union if a majority sign cards saying that is their wish. "If they want the community to accept something that includes extraordinary height, they need to offer extraordinary public benefits," Van Valkenburgh said.

But what constitutes "public benefits" could be up for interpretation.

Nick Steinmeier, director of the Santa Cruz chapters of Service Employees International Union Local 421, said his members include 450 city workers who gave up a 5 percent cost-of-living

raise this year. Right now, the city faces an \$8 million deficit and the Transit Occupancy Tax, paid by hotel guests, would contribute to the general fund from which workers' paychecks are cut.

SEIU has not taken a position on the hotel, Steinmeier said, but "right now we have to carefully evaluate any revenue options so the city can continue providing services to the public."

Councilman Mike Rotkin said he has not examined the newest plans in detail and is reserving his decision for the council meeting next month.

However, "I'm still generally disposed toward supporting this project," Rotkin said.

EXTRA