



Barry Swenson Builder has changed its hotel and conference center plan for La Bahia, killing a proposed fifth story some neighbors and Coastal Commission staff opposed. This rendition shows the revised plan from Westbrook Street.

# La Bahia plan scaled back



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Barry Swenson Builder apparently took the advice of this change-making machine on Beach Street, and has changed its plan for La Bahia to appease neighbors.

## Developer lops off 10 feet but state OK still uncertain

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Developers seeking to replace the historic La Bahia apartment building across from Main Beach with a luxury hotel are scaling back their original five-story plans to gain acceptance from a state board

that ultimately could decide the hotel's fate.

It's unclear, however, if the new design will be enough to appease the Coastal Commission, or if Barry Swenson Builder will be forced to scale back its plans for a 125-room hotel even further before winning approval from the body that governs

development along the California coast.

The new design involves lopping off the top floor of two proposed towers in the rear of the hotel and moving those rooms to fill in the center. The hotel's maximum height would shrink to 60 feet. Jesse Nickell, vice president of Barry Swenson

Builder, said the changes compromise the design and make it look more boxy, but that the developer is looking to appease opponents.

But the revised plan still might not be enough for Coastal Commission members, who will have the final

## La Bahia proposal

NEW DESIGN FOR LUXURY HOTEL ON BEACH STREET

**HEIGHT:** About 60 feet at its tallest point.

**ROOMS:** 125.

**STORIES:** Ranging from three to five and a half, plus two stories of underground parking.

**PARKING:** 201 spaces.

**SOURCE:** Barry Swenson Builder

## La Bahia

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say on whether the hotel is built should the Santa Cruz City Council approve the project. Commission staff has asked Swenson to comply with city codes that limit the building's height to 43 feet, while keeping its architectural integrity intact, according to a letter dated May 28 from commission planner Susan Craig.

"That's the main issue, is the bulk and the mass and the height," Craig said.

Nickell said the commission staff's requests were not a shock, as they haven't changed since the project was first proposed. But it wasn't until recently that Swenson's staff hired a consultant and examined what to do to garner the commission's approval. That consultant strongly recommended following the commission staff's recommendation, Nickell said.

"We're going back and trying to work with them now," Nickell said.

His designers also will be working with the city's architect to ensure the hotel design is what city leaders and the Coastal Commission would like to see.

The redesign means hotel plans might not go before City Council for approval until the end of the year instead of next month as originally planned. That could turn the hotel into a campaign issue as four council seats are up for grabs in November.

Some neighbors and community members strongly oppose the project, saying it must conform with city codes. Union members also have fought the hotel because Swenson refuses to hire union labor exclusively.

Other, however, see the project as key to the beach area's revitalization, and say a luxury hotel would help spruce up the area and boost city coffers with hotel tax revenue.

Don Webber, who lives behind La Bahia, still opposes the design, despite the 10-foot drop in height.

"I think that a smaller hotel, 90 to 100 suites, is the likely outcome," Webber predicted.

Nickell said the hotel must have at least 125 rooms to pencil out financially. The new design keeps the room count, Nickell said, but rearranges where each room would go.

Mayor Ryan Coonerty, who is generally supportive of the hotel project, said he is happy to see the developers responding to community concerns.

In addition, "it's incredibly important that we pass a project that can be approved by the Coastal Commission," Coonerty said. "Otherwise this would just be an exercise in futility."

Contact G. Bookwalter at 706-3286  
or gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com.

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