

# Plans afoot to rejuvenate Cooper House

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A prospective new owner for the historic Cooper House in downtown Santa Cruz has proposed to renovate both the Cooper House and the old County Jail building and integrate them as major commercial centers.

Nance Lee McKendrick, real estate broker for the building, said a \$2-million offer for the purchase of the Cooper House has been accepted by the Sanchez Family Trust, the current owners of the building.

Jay Paul, a Los Gatos real estate developer, is the prospective buyer.

McKendrick said, "His vision is to integrate both buildings and create something wonderful for Santa Cruz."

Paul, she said, "has the resources and the artistic sense to do an outstanding project with the Cooper House and the Jail behind it."

Most of Paul's development work has been in the San Jose area, but he has also recently

proposed to develop the Pajaro Hills Commercial Center in Watsonville, which was recently approved.

McKendrick said Paul had retained the architectural firm that renovated Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco to renovate the Cooper House and jail.

The Cooper House, once a thriving commercial center in the '60s and '70s, has deteriorated in recent years with many store owners moving out. The restaurant and saloon, once the focal point of downtown Santa Cruz, has been empty since the summer.

The property has been for sale for \$2.5 million since August.

However, a major problem muddies the prospects for the final sale of the building.

A lawsuit filed by Brian Roeder, the former manager of the bar and restaurant, against the Sanchez Family Trust over a business dispute has resulted in a *lis pendens* against the

building. That means the building cannot be sold until the lawsuit is settled.

"The Sanchez Family Trust feels this is a nuisance suit," McKendrick said. "We hope this is quickly resolved or else they'll be jeopardizing a wonderful project for Santa Cruz."

The new project, McKendrick said, would completely renovate the County Jail. The County Art Museum holds the lease on the jail. By having Paul come in and renovate the four floors of the jail, the art museum could have space on the first floor and the upper three floors could be turned into retail space.

The rent from the retail space would subsidize the renovation work and the low cost of space for the art museum.

Also, McKendrick said, the small park between the Cooper House and jail could be extended and landscaped to create a large open space for the city.

As for the Cooper House

itself, McKendrick said she could not divulge all of Paul's plans for the building.

However, she said there were already two offers to open up the restaurant and cafe. The saloon would probably not be reopened and would probably become a retail store, she said.

"Liquor seems to be a thing of the past," she said.

As for other retail tenants, McKendrick said that once the building was properly maintained and stable, there would be no problem attracting other tenants.

She added that she was hoping for an escrow settlement within the next 30 days.

"The only anxiety we have is the Roeder lawsuit," she said.

Roeder could not be reached for comment this morning.

The Cooper House was built in 1895 as the county courthouse. When the new courthouse was built in the 1960s, the Cooperhouse was renovated as a commercial center.