

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

The tower of the Cemex plant in Davenport has stood silent since 2010. The Sempervirens Fund is exploring whether to purchase the plant.

# Nonprofit eyes Cemex plant for acquisition

Conservation group could re-imagine polluted site as North Coast gateway

By JASON HOPPIN

jhoppin@santacruzsentinel.com

DAVENPORT — A well-regarded nonprofit is exploring whether to acquire Davenport's decommissioned Cemex Corp. cement plant, hoping to remove the hulking structure and use the area as a gateway to thousands of acres of conserved North Coast lands.

Los Altos-based Sempervirens Fund, one of several conservation groups to recently secure 8,500 mountainous acres above Davenport formerly owned by Cemex, is interested in acquiring the plant site as part of an ambitious plan to permanently protect the sparsely populated, postcard-beautiful coastal mountains above Santa Cruz.

"Instead of having an industrial use we

## CEMEX

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could have something really nice there that serves the community and serves the area," said Reed Holderman, Sempervirens Fund's executive director.

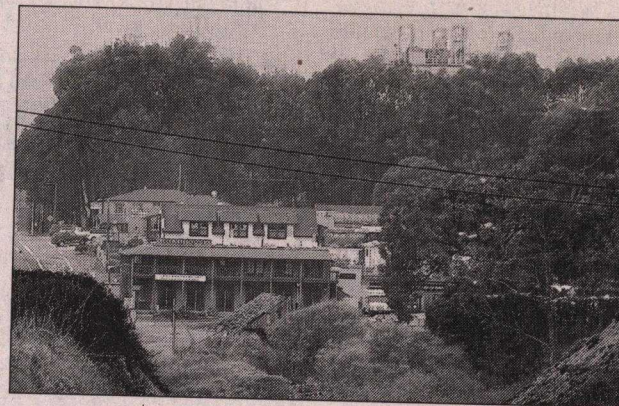
The idea is in the very early stages, but Sempervirens Fund recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Center for Creative Land Recycling to further explore the pollution problem there.

The plant is still owned by Cemex, which is working on remediation and a closure plan that isn't likely to be approved before 2014.

"It's a process that will take a bit," said Tim Fillmore, hazardous materials manager for the county.

That plan is likely to address soil and asbestos issues, as well as several above-ground fuel tanks. The plant has been the site of reported spills and cleanups over the years, and there are deposits of cement kiln dust, including an exposed site containing an estimated 850,000 cubic yards of caked dust that fills a small valley.

Sempervirens Fund is in limbo until that plan is completed, and Holderman said one possibility is to take over the land at no cost and continue the cleanup. He said other parties are interested



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

The small North Coast town of Davenport lies in the shadow of the towers of the idled Cemex cement plant.

in buying components of the plant itself from Cemex.

While the nonprofit is typically not in the business of repurposing contaminated land, Holderman formerly worked at the The Trust for Public Land, which spearheaded an effort to convert a 32-acre brownfield site on the edge of Los Angeles' Chinatown, known as the Cornfields, into a community park.

One possible way to pay for the reuse is a visitor-oriented development, such as a small hotel or resort. Holderman also mentioned a possible community center or farmers market, though any ideas are preliminary at best.

"(Cemex) won't entertain this conversation with us until the county finishes" the closure plan, Holder-

man said.

In addition to the 8,500-acre property known as the Cemex Redwoods, Sempervirens Fund has been active in conservation efforts throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains. The group envisions piecing together what has been called "The Great Park," a protected expanse of coastal ranges running from Pescadero to Santa Cruz.

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of Supervisors Chairman Neal Coonerty, who represents Davenport, said he was excited about the possibility of Sempervirens' involvement.

"We definitely want to see a reuse of the property. We don't want to put a fence put around it and just watch it rust. We're delighted that Sempervirens Fund has an interest in it," Coonerty said, adding the group's involvement seemed like a natural fit.

"It goes from one of the most polluting plants in the world — a cement plant — to what would be a great environmental asset. That's a huge turnaround," he said.

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