

Santa Cruz hotel, arts center win OK

Hotels + Boarding Houses
DESIGN UNDER WRAPS FOR EX-DREAM INN

By David L. Beck
Mercury News

As officials brooded over two massive projects that will help redefine Santa Cruz before boldly voting to go ahead with both, the question on everybody's lips went unanswered:

What's that hotel going to look like, anyway?

That hotel is the proposed 270-room replacement for the 160-room Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, a waterfront landmark known locally by its birth name, the Dream Inn. Overlooking Cowell Beach and the Wharf, it will come with substantial conference facilities as well as a parking structure for nearly 700 vehicles.

The other project, reaffirmed Tuesday by the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency is the Tannery Arts Center, which will transform a 150-year-old leather factory into apartments and studios for individual artists —

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JOHN WOOLFOLK — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

Plans to replace the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel, which was the Dream Inn in this 1997 photograph, were approved.

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along with offices, conference facilities and performance spaces for practically every important arts organization in the county.

It's the city's attempt to save a bit of its history while boosting its own profile among artists who now think of the city as inspirational but unaffordable.

The tentative price tag for the Tannery Arts Center: \$43 million.

The tentative price tag for the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel: possibly as much as \$100 million, which is \$26 million more than the original estimates. The still-unknown gap between what the owner, Northwest Hospitality Group of Boise, Idaho, can finance and what the facility actually costs, is likely to fall to the redevelopment agency to cover.

In tandem with two other projects — the Monterey Bay Sanctuary's planned visitor center and museum, which will face the new hotel across Beach Street, and the boutique-style hotel and confer-

ence center at La Bahia, two blocks away — the new hotel will transform the Main Beach-Boardwalk area. Together, they will transform the fading 1950s beach town look of an area that is the destination point for flocks of tourists — millions, according to boardwalk figures.

Two-hour sessions

"Any project that gets the support of the Chamber" of Commerce, "unions and neighbors in one meeting has really accomplished something," said City Council member Cynthia Mathews after Tuesday's two-hour session on the hotel.

The council, which doubles as the board of the redevelopment agency, devoted another two hours to the arts center.

The look of the arts center is fairly well fixed by history. The Salz Leather Tannery, which closed in 2002, is a collection of low redwood and redwood-colored buildings on the bank of the San Lorenzo River, near the junction of highways 1 and 9. Several of

the old buildings will be rehabilitated for the project, and new construction will be designed to blend with the old.

But the look of the hotel will remain unclear at least until September, when architect Mark Hornberger of San Francisco promises a peek at his plans. Until then, said Northwest Hospitality President Robert J. Suits, "He won't even tell me."

The board voted unanimously to pursue Hornberger's preferred preliminary design: three connected lodgings of six, seven and nine stories on the beach side, and conference, banquet and parking facilities across the street. The two sides would be connected by an arched pedestrian walkway above the street and a service tunnel below it.

After the meeting, Hornberger referred to "the natural color of the bluffs" and said the design would be a "descendant" of older beach-hotel styles, without mimicking them. It probably will employ several colors, avoiding the current hotel's beige

monolith style, which one architecture critic once described as an ice cube tray on end. ("We own a successful hotel right now," Suits said. "An ugly, successful hotel.")

Filling the funding gap

During the next two months, the hotel firm and the redevelopment agency will explore various mechanisms for filling the funding gap, ranging from an increase in the hotel tax — which voters have twice rejected — to city ownership of the parking facility and even the conference facility.

The vote on the Tannery Arts Center also was unanimous. It included support for the use of tax increment funding for part of the project, and it accepted Artspace Inc., of Minneapolis, to oversee the project. Artspace, which converts old properties into housing and offices for non-profits, conducted the original feasibility study.

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