

Redevelopment Unit Derails Courthouse

By Alan Jones
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County building plans were derailed last night by an irate Santa Cruz redevelopment agency.

Architects' plans for the five-story, county office building probably will have to be redrawn, a task that could take months and would kill county hopes for January bid-taking on the \$5.5-million complex.

The agency will approve the plans only if county supervisors officially agree to include 16 changes listed by state fire prevention engineer Robert Bishop. At least two of the faults found by Bishop will require major structural changes.

Agency members were plainly angry at the county's handling of the situation. Supervisors last month countermanded an informal agreement of agency and county officials to turn over the fire and structural inspection of plans to the International Conference of Building Officials.

Instead, the supervisors asked the state fire marshal's office to make the fire inspection. Agency members implied the shift was made in hopes of getting a more favorable report.

Agency chairman Carl Nelson charged that the county had "deliberately concealed these problems for 14 months" in an attempt to get agency approval of plans. If construction is delayed, the county is to blame, Nelson said.

The agency came into possession last month of a fire marshal's report to the county, dated September, 1963. The year-old report listed basically the same shortcomings as the new report.

The two major faults listed in the new report are these:

1. "Numerous pipe penetrations of the two-hour hollow stud wall negates the two-hour fire resistive stairway and vertical shaft requirements." This means that to preserve the two-hour firewalls most or all of the building's piping would have to be re-routed.

2. "Calculated occupant load of the building on the upper levels requires a minimum of three stairways . . ." The plans show two stairways. A third would require major changes.

The county normally could declare itself exempt from city building code requirements. But in this case, the county signed an agreement with the agency to abide by local codes, and gave the agency power to reject building plans.

Another bombshell was dropped by city building inspection supervisor William Nunes. Nunes charged that courthouse

architects Rockwell and Banwell had deliberately tried to skirt city codes.

Nunes said he inspected the plans in September, 1963, and told Burton Rockwell that the building's core layout did not meet city or county codes. Rockwell was then told by county officials, Nunes said, to "stay away" from city hall because the county didn't have to abide by the city code.

The agency now plans to require compliance with any structural report, and further to require compliance with any structural changes recommended in the ICBO report, which is expected next week. The structural changes would be aimed at bringing the building up to city code or the equivalent.

The Bishop report gave the architect one major victory, however. Bishop said the "concept of an interior smoke tower" is in his opinion "not detrimental to safe egress from the building." City and agency officials have objected to the tower structure because it does not meet the uniform building code.

The Bishop report primarily concerns the five-story office building, but in parts also applies to the one-story courthouse plans.

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