

Center doesn't violate permit

By DENISE FRANKLIN

Sentinel staff writer

10-7-90
SANTA CRUZ — Chaminade Executive Conference Center has changed in character over the past 11 years, but is not in violation of its use permit, according to a senior county planner.

Neighbors charged last week that Chaminade is operating as a hotel rather than the conference center allowed under its permit. The issue came up during a meeting on the center's expansion plans.

True, Chaminade does allow the public to rent its rooms for a night or two, said senior planner Bob Leggett. But the use permit allows this, he said.

The permit, issued in 1979, is for "the development of a conference center for a maximum of 240 temporary occupants and 35 non-residential staff for minimum periods of two days ..."

But it also allows "reasonable community use of the property when not already otherwise committed."

It wasn't the owners of Chaminade that insisted on this public use, said Leggett, but the Board of Supervisors back in 1979. Supervisors, he said, added this condition so that the historical public access to the property would continue.

Before a group of 15 partners remodeled existing buildings and

built hotel rooms, swimming pool and health club, the 88-acre site overlooking Monterey Bay was a Catholic boys school. The public for years had used the school's playing fields and had hiked on trails throughout the property, Leggett said.

The issue of hotel use was first raised in 1985, said Leggett. The conference facility reportedly was having financial trouble and had begun to open up more and more of its facilities, including restaurants and hotel rooms, for public use.

Leggett was told then by the county counsel that because the use permit allows community use of the property, hotel rooms open to the public must be allowed.

But Leggett recently questioned Chaminade's opening of its health club to nearby residents and to employees at Dominican Hospital. He called it "a reach" of the use permit.

Gary and Linda Bergthold, who live off Chaminade Lane near the facility, were involved in the negotiations over the use permit in 1979.

"At the time, it was going to be a facility for conference use only," said Gary. "A hotel was not at all the original concept. One of the things was that they were not going to be allowed to serve alcohol to the general public.

The owners tentatively plan to

add 150 hotel rooms, build a medical complex off Paul Sweet Road below the conference center and construct 10-15 homes near the Santa Cruz Gardens subdivision. No plans have yet been submitted to the county.

"My opposition is really to the new plans," Gary Bergthold said.

Another Chaminade neighbor last week complained that the center never dedicated trails to the public like it was supposed to in its use permit.

The use permit states that existing trails be dedicated as "public pedestrian and equestrian easements." An offer for dedication has never been made, said Leggett. Trails, however, have remained open to the public.

Gerald Bowden, attorney for Chaminade owners, noted the use permit is for the 88 acres Chaminade has developed as a conference center. The trails neighbors are concerned about, he said, are located on 200 undeveloped acres behind Chaminade. No use permit exists for this acreage because no development has yet been proposed to the county.

Bowden noted that if Chaminade is eventually allowed to expand like it hopes to, it will no longer have to operate like a hotel. Instead, the expanded conference facilities and revenues from the sale of homes will be enough to keep the center afloat, he said.