



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Opponents of the La Bahia project protest on Beach Street on Thursday, raising awareness among residents about the City Council vote next month.

Protesters vent frustration with La Bahia proposal

✓ Hotels + Boarding Houses

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SANTA CRUZ — As summer winds down, the battle over whether to build a new, 125-room hotel across the street from Main Beach is heating up.

About 100 protesters — from union members to neighbors to community members —

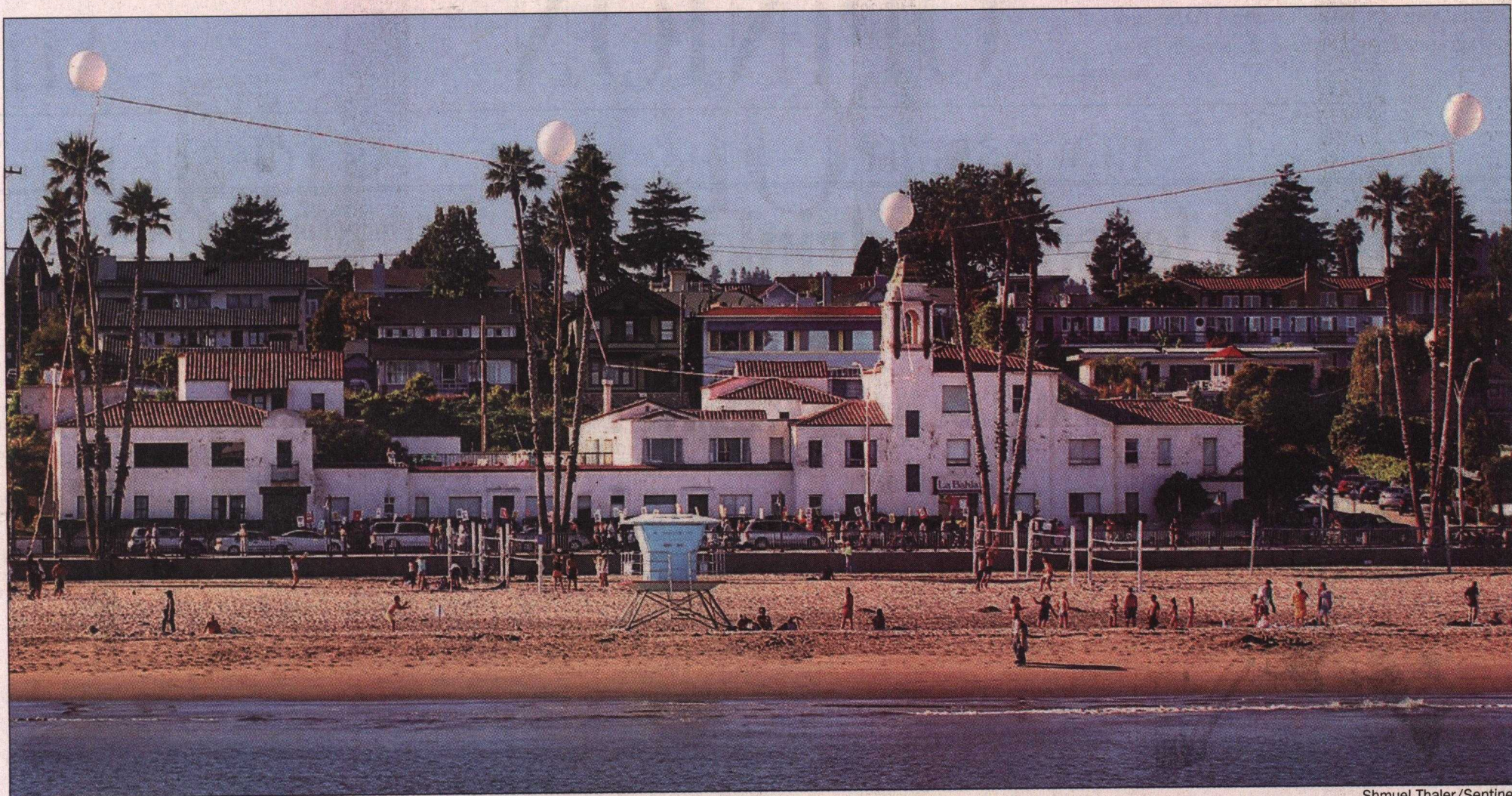
marched in front of La Bahia on Beach Street Thursday evening, while four tethered giant white balloons waved in the wind above the sand across the street, illustrating how tall the new hotel would be. While the protest — complete with union chants, horns and picket signs — might have perplexed sunburned tourists, its main purpose was to raise awareness among city residents that council mem-

bers could decide next month whether to allow a new luxury hotel on the property. The vote is tentatively set for Sept. 23.

"We believe the current plan violates Santa Cruz values," said Mark Weller with Unite Here! Local 483, which represents hotel and restaurant workers in Santa Cruz and Mon-

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Opponents of the La Bahia project floated helium balloons to heights they contend show the elevations of the proposed hotel during a protest on Thursday.

La Bahia

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terey counties. Protesters on Thursday included "not just one alarmed group, it's many," Weller said.

At issue is a proposal from Barry Swenson Builder of San Jose to tear down the La Bahia apartments, a dilapidated, 80-year

old Beach Street landmark, and replace it with a luxury hotel. The new lodgings would include 125 rooms, 5,300 square feet of meeting space, a 3,000-square-foot bar and restaurant, a swimming pool and an underground parking garage with nearly 200 spaces.

But various groups oppose the plans for various reasons. Union members would like to see all union labor employed in construction and operation of the

hotel; preservationists would like to see more of the old La Bahia saved; and neighbors and others would like to see developers abide by city rules that they and others spent countless hours putting into place. As it stands, the council will need to make exceptions to the city's general plan, a thick document crafted with thousands of hours of public input that guides Santa Cruz development, before allow-

ing the hotel to be built.

Or, more bluntly, "We're opposing it because it's too big," said Don Webber, a Beach Hill resident who lives directly behind where the proposed hotel would stand.

Webber said he is not fighting because the hotel would take away his view. Instead, he said, he is peeved because the builders want exceptions to the city's general plan and not to comply

with requests from the city's Historic Preservation Commission, among other things.

That plan and commission, Webber said, are two of the checks that the city has in place to make sure new development fits in the city.

Jesse Nickell with Barry Swenson said he hears the complaints, but there is no feasible way to save much of the old building. He has committed to using 60

to 70 percent union labor, and those who aren't union will be local contractors, he said.

Nickell said he believes the hotel is worth the city making exceptions for.

"We still remain optimistic. We think it's the right thing to do for Beach Street. It's progressive, it's visionary," Nickell said.

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