

La Bahia residents don't want to leave

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By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Tenants of the La Bahia Apartments took reporters and city council members on a public relations tour of the 53-year-old building this morning.

Their message: We are not slum-dwellers. And we want to stay.

The sightseeing trip was aimed at publicizing Tuesday night's City Council hearing on a proposal by a Sacramento developer to build a 210-room hotel on the site of the La Bahia Apartments on Beach Street.

City regulations for the beachfront zone put a limit of 115 rooms on the 1.5 acre site. Last month the city planning commission denied developer Thomas Underly's request to lift the room restrictions. When it came before council members, they voted to stage a hearing to decide whether they should change zoning laws for that area to allow the hotel project to proceed.

Underly wants to build a "high quality" hotel, possibly through the Hilton franchise for the land across the street from the Boardwalk.

He wants the council to remove the restrictions for the land and review each stage of the hotel project separately. The zone runs from Front to Riverside Streets and from Beach to Second Streets. This would include the La Bahia, the Casablanca Restaurant, and a parking lot used by the Seaside Co. next to the Boardwalk.

The Boardwalk would not be included in the zoning change.

If the council sides with Underly, he is expected to file plans for the new hotel and go back to the Planning Commission. If it doesn't, Underly has said he will not pursue the project.

Council members Michael Rotkin and Jane Weed took part in the tour of well-scrubbed apartments with cracked plaster walls and sweeping ocean views.

They heard from tenants such as Lisa Doughty.

"This is not a slum," she said. "I've lived in this town for 15 years and I could never find a place this good that takes kids."

Doughty pays \$500 a month for the two-bedroom apartment she shares with her husband and two children. She has lived

Please see back of section

La Bahia tour

Continued from Page A1

there three years.

"It's ridiculous to to tear this down after all the money they put into repairs on it," she said.

Laura Perry, a representative of the La Bahia tenant's association, said residents are looking into buying the apartment building and running it as a cooperative.

She maintained the building is well-kept and said a portion of the tenant's rent goes specifically into maintenance and repair as a part of an agreement with the owners.

Joining La Bahia tenants in opposing the hotel are Beach Flats residents, who fear losing their homes to redevelopment plans.

Beach wharf merchants and the

Chamber of Commerce are among its supporters.

Rotkin said he was surprised Underly was still going ahead with his plans. Rotkin wants Underly to pay for finding new housing for all of the La Bahia's tenants and to take care of the traffic the hotel would generate.

"I'm willing to consider a proposal, but the kinds of questions I'm asking would cost the developer a lot of money."

Weed said she had not made up her mind on the project, but said she had qualms about its location.

"I don't know where the final votes are on this," Rotkin said. "The public hearing is going to be very important."

The hearing begins at 7:30 p.m. in the council chambers.