

Marinovich bldg. to be torn down

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

The city Building Department has issued a permit to the Wells Fargo Bank to demolish the 81-year-old Marinovich Building at Union and Peck streets.

The Marinovich family is selling the structure to the bank, which has had longstanding plans to put a parking lot on the site.

According to Robert Prestidge of the bank's real property management office in San Francisco, the sale is now in escrow. He declined to reveal the purchase price.

Prestidge said this morning that his office would make every effort to ensure that the parking lot does not become an eyesore. "We've never been accused" of doing a bad job with landscaping, he said.

The news of the looming demolition came as a surprise this morning to two tenants of the first floor of the building.

"Bill (Marinovich) is not ready to sell," said Josephine Jackowski, part owner of the Steamroller bar. "We just paid out rent on the first of the month, and he (Bill) would have told us about it."

Ed Moretti, owner of Johnson-Leggett stationery store, on the first floor, said he heard a rumor about the demolition this morning and "I have a call into Bill Marinovich now."

Moretti said that under terms of his lease he could not be evicted without at least six months notice.

This provision of the lease might cause some problems for the bank, since the demolition permit is only good for 120 days, building official Dick Jones said this morning.

Jones said that because of the "controversial nature" of the proposed demoli-

tion, he would not renew the permit when it expired.

"I'll turn it over to the Redevelopment Agency (City Council)," he said.

Jones said, however, that when the permit expired, the bank had the option of paying for another one ("about \$70"). But the demolition plans must once again be "run through" the planning, public works, fire and building departments, he added.

Marinovich, a local attorney, could not be reached this morning.

The demolition issue had first been raised publicly in the summer of 1976, when it was learned that the bank had set its sights on purchasing the structure.

Marinovich said then that the bank had first approached him "five years ago," but that he had "just sort of resisted."

The news this morning dismayed historic preservationists and some downtown revitalization advocates, although some of the latter did not seem overly concerned about the loss of the building.

Monte Lewis, president of the Watsonville Area Development Corporation, a group dedicated to downtown redevelopment, said he has "mixed emotions" about the demolition.

"At this point the WADC doesn't want to take a position," he said, noting that the board of directors of the corporation had met this morning but was unaware of the issuance of the demolition permit.

He said he regretted that the building would come down, but added that "it's sort of an eyesore anyway."

His wife Betty, who is president of the Pajaro Valley Historical Assn., said that "any building" is better than "open spaces around the plaza."

"I can understand the bank's position (of needing more parking), but it's a

tragedy to pull down the building," she said.

Mrs. Lewis said the Victorian structure, built in 1899, was originally called the Green Building until it was purchased by the Marinovich family.

When a survey by Berkeley architecture students was done several years ago, it was given a "number one" rating for architectural significance.

Roger Hoffman, developer of the Mansion House, has maintained that the plaza is a "picture that needs a frame."

Chuck Rowe, former city planner and a longtime downtown devotee, said this morning: "It's a vintage building with rare quality. It's unfortunate a bank that is based in history would take this action."

Rowe said he was speaking personally, and not as a staff member of the WADC.

Pat Pirtle of the Historical Assn. said she was dismayed that the City Council has never adopted a historical preservation ordinance.

Such an ordinance would not prevent demolitions of historic buildings, but simply give the public a chance to comment on proposed demolitions, as well as see if any developers are interested in rehabilitating the threatened buildings.

Russ Hoss, the city's redevelopment director, said that he wouldn't oppose the demolition, saying that the issue had pretty much been decided before he was hired several months ago.

He said, though, that steps should be taken to ensure that the parking lot is "intelligently and well designed."

He added that sometimes in the redevelopment process it is necessary to tear down old buildings — especially when it means keeping a valuable asset to the downtown such as Wells Fargo.

