

Kalich restoration given green light



The Kalich Building (left) on Main Street, near East Beach Street, still sits empty.

Tarmo Hannula

Historic William Weeks building to be remodeled soon

By MICHAEL MERRILL

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — An excellent example of turn-of-the-century Watsonville — which at one point was close to ending its 84-year history under the weight of a wrecking ball — has been given a reprieve by the husband and wife team of Randy Repass and Sally-Christine Rodgers.

After purchasing the time-worn edifice, currently known as the Kalich Building, in 1997, Re-

pass and Rodgers set out to restore it to its original grandeur and hired the architectural firm of Jacobowsky Hawkins Walker Architects, Inc.

The firm was given instructions to recreate the exterior facade with as much period authenticity as possible. This requires the stripping away of years' worth of additions and alterations which had masked the original vision of architect William H. Weeks.

Tuesday, the Watsonville rede-

velopment agency issued a special use permit to remodel the structure. Plans call for the establishment of 14 residential units above the first floor which will be devoted to business uses. The project consists of the demolition of the interior first floor, ceiling, framing, back stairway, mezzanine, plumbing and chimney. When completed there will be room for seven retail businesses.

The second floor will be completely refurbished and contain nine

one-bedroom, three studios and two two-bedroom units, according to Watsonville Associate Planner Mari Alsip.

The exterior will be restored as close as possible to its original look. Alsip said some of the original Roman brick has been found under layers of plaster and this will be restored and rehabilitated as needed. "The plan is to bring the building back to its historic character," Alsip said.

"They will remove all additions and restore it to the original brick front. This will provide quite an upgrade."

"We expect to see completed plans in the near future," said David S. Williams, community development director. "We anticipate that we will be issuing building permits within six weeks of receiving the completed plans."

Williams would not speculate on the exact amount of time it will take to complete the project, but he said it could be done in as little as eight months.

According to Lynn Sanders, Re-

pass' administrative assistant, the couple, who have been involved with several philanthropic endeavors in the area, wanted to do something which would aid in the city's recovery. "The main goal of this project is to contribute to the quality of life here in the Pajaro Valley," Sanders said. "(Repass and Rodgers) are working with the city to try and revitalize the downtown corridor and restore it to a viable business environment."

The Kalich Building, originally named the Brewington Block, was designed by Weeks and built in 1914 and has been a downtown landmark for nearly 85 years. Those years took their toll, however, and it fell victim to time and deterioration.

With over 17,000 square feet of

interior space, the building originally housed a 468-seat theater named the "Lyric" and included the 28-room Hotel Ames. In the ensuing years, several businesses were opened along the street level and eventually the theater was closed. By 1960, the second story was used primarily as a rooming house, while the first floor remained retail space.

In 1970, the second floor was abandoned — deemed unsafe due to code violations — and the owner at the time believed that improvements would be too costly.

About 10 years later, Glenn Olives, a general partner in Watson Valle Enterprises Ltd. and the building's owner at that time, petitioned the city to designate

the structure as historically significant. In May 1981 his request was granted by the city council. It was hoped that this designation would allow the building to be improved to a 1971 seismic standard, which would have been less costly.

Plans to repair the building were halted in 1989 when the Loma Prieta earthquake left the structure so severely damaged that it was deemed to be unsafe and uninhabitable. The Board of Appeals passed final judgment on the property in 1996 — either bring it up to code or face demolition.

The following year, Repass and Rogers stepped in, purchased the building and saved it from destruction.