

# SWIFTCURRENTS

## Save City Hall

by Carolyn Swift

Latently it seems monumentally attention has been turned toward the emergence and character of a "NEW" Santa Cruz.

The historic dignity of the old Pacific Garden Mall — toppled by 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake and scraped clean in the years thereafter — has been supplanted by a fresh landscape that joins the new with a few surviving landmark structures.

But while city leaders celebrate their burgeoning revival, another crippled historic building sits on death row.

Included in the *Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey* and eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Santa Cruz City Hall at Center and Locust streets is a 1938 building of Early California style, considered in 1940 to be among the state's most attractive civic buildings. Even as late as 1973, the *Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California* referred to the modest facility as "the ideal of what one expects of a small California City hall."

Unfortunately, the north section of the city hall complex — occupied by the Police Records and Administration wing — was severely damaged in the earthquake. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) received an application and agreed to provide funding toward repair or reconstruction, since both were found to cost about the same.

And, while FEMA regulators would not agree to pay for any additional costs other than to exactly replace the structure as it existed the day of the quake, the relief funds they would provide toward a new building got city staff to think about what city leaders could do with a little bit more money from city coffers.

The City Police Department officers had already documented a long-standing need for approximately 24,000 square feet of additional space, and clever police leaders saw this as their chance to modernize their headquarters and gain extra room for their offices.

As a result, City of Santa Cruz leaders elected to pursue a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with FEMA and the California Office of Emergency Services which will allow that portion of the old City Hall to be demolished and a new, two-story replacement to be built.

But while the City is moving toward demolition and replacement, preservation interests in the City and County have started mobilizing to make sure everybody knows what's about to be gained or lost.

These preservationists believe there are alternatives to razing yet another significant piece of downtown's historical heritage. The old building could be restored at a lesser cost for use by other city services, for example, while a separate one is

constructed elsewhere to meet the needs of Police.

Anthony Kirk of Santa Cruz, a member of the Santa Cruz Historic Preservation Commission, said it is important for people to be aware of proposed actions concerning City Hall, because it's one of the landmarks associated with the basic identity of Santa Cruz.

"We have lost a number of the major ones — the Cooperhouse, the Trust building and the St. George, among others," he said. "Of the surviving structures, the two most traditionally important are the post office and city hall."

Kirk is among an expanding number of historians and preservationists with concerns about city plans.

Terri Fisher, chairperson of the Santa Cruz County Resources Commission, recently wrote a letter "strongly opposing the proposed demolition," citing questions the commission has about the city's heretofore compliance with regulations and the adequacy of the Environmental Review.

In behalf of the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust, Executive Director Peggy Coats noted in a letter to Mayor Scott Kennedy and the Santa Cruz City Council that the new structure is to be "both substantially larger in scale and architecturally different in style" in comparison to the existing historic structure.

"Based on what we understand at this point, we are in opposition to

demolition of the structure and we are concerned that adequate public hearings have not materialized, to our knowledge," Coates wrote on June 1. "We would like to request that we be included in the hearing process, enabling us to have our viewpoints considered in decision making and allowing us to participate in dialogue regarding alternatives."

Diane Louie, acting chairperson of the Santa Cruz City Historic Preservation Commission, has announced that discussion of the proposed demolition will be the main agenda topic at the commission's meeting July 20. Concerned organizations and individuals are invited to give their ideas and opinions at this meeting scheduled at 7:30 p.m. in the Santa Cruz City Council Chambers.

People who want to know more about the proposed fate of the Santa Cruz City Hall can view a "consultation package" at the following locations before the upcoming meeting: Santa Cruz Public Library Central Branch, 224 Church Street; Santa Cruz City Clerk's office, Room 9; City Council office, Room 10, and the Santa Cruz City Planning Department, Room 206, all at 809 Center Street. Included in the publication is information about the City's preferred design alternative and other materials prepared by the firm of Nolte and Associates of San Jose.

Those concerned about preservation of this historic structure are further urged to make comments directly to FEMA by writing to Sandro Amaglio, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Building 105, Presidio of San Francisco, CA, 94129.

The needs of the Police Department are no doubt valid and the costs of saving a building must always be weighed against its significance. However, it appears that to date there has not been a full consideration of alternative sites, nor has the public had enough opportunity to have its say about the building's future.

The odd part of this is that the City of Santa Cruz evidently has in the past considered City Hall sufficiently valuable to warrant preservation. It has listed in the Cultural Resources Element of the City of Santa Cruz General Plan a policy to "Inventory City-owned properties of historic interest and develop and implement plans for their protection, restoration and/or rehabilitation, including but not limited to DeLaveaga Covered Bridge, West Cliff Drive Bridge, Carmelita Cottages, Fire Station #1, City Hall, the Wharf and Plaza Park."

In light of the number of buildings destroyed or lost to other causes since the earthquake, my own view is that the merit of the old City Hall is greater than ever is