

# Cooper House ready to rise again

## Construction may start next month

By KAREN CLARK  
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SANTA CRUZ — This time, it's for real. 10-2-97  
They hope.

On Tuesday, developer Jay Paul took out a building permit to start construction on the long-delayed Cooper House project.

"Now he can build anytime," said Dick Stubendorff, the city's chief building official.

Stubendorff said Paul told city officials he planned to begin construction in four to five weeks, which means workers would have to contend with what is being forecast as a possibly record-breaking rainy season.

As has been his custom, Paul did not return phone calls about the project.

In 1991, Paul announced that he would transform the vacant lot at the corner of Pacific Avenue and Cooper Street into a five-story building with a Mediterranean-style facade. The plans eventually were approved, and the community waited for its new Cooper House.

But for six years, Paul faced a variety of unexpected financial obstacles, including an inability to sign key tenants to occupy the massive amount of office space. False starts were common, and construction was delayed time and again.

This time, however, city leaders believe that the act of taking out a building permit — and paying the more than \$70,000 in fees necessary to do it — is a solid indication that Santa Cruz is on the verge of witnessing the start of construction.

"You wouldn't pay those kind of fees unless you were ready to start," said Planning Director Eileen Fogarty. "I think it's a fair assumption that they're proceeding."

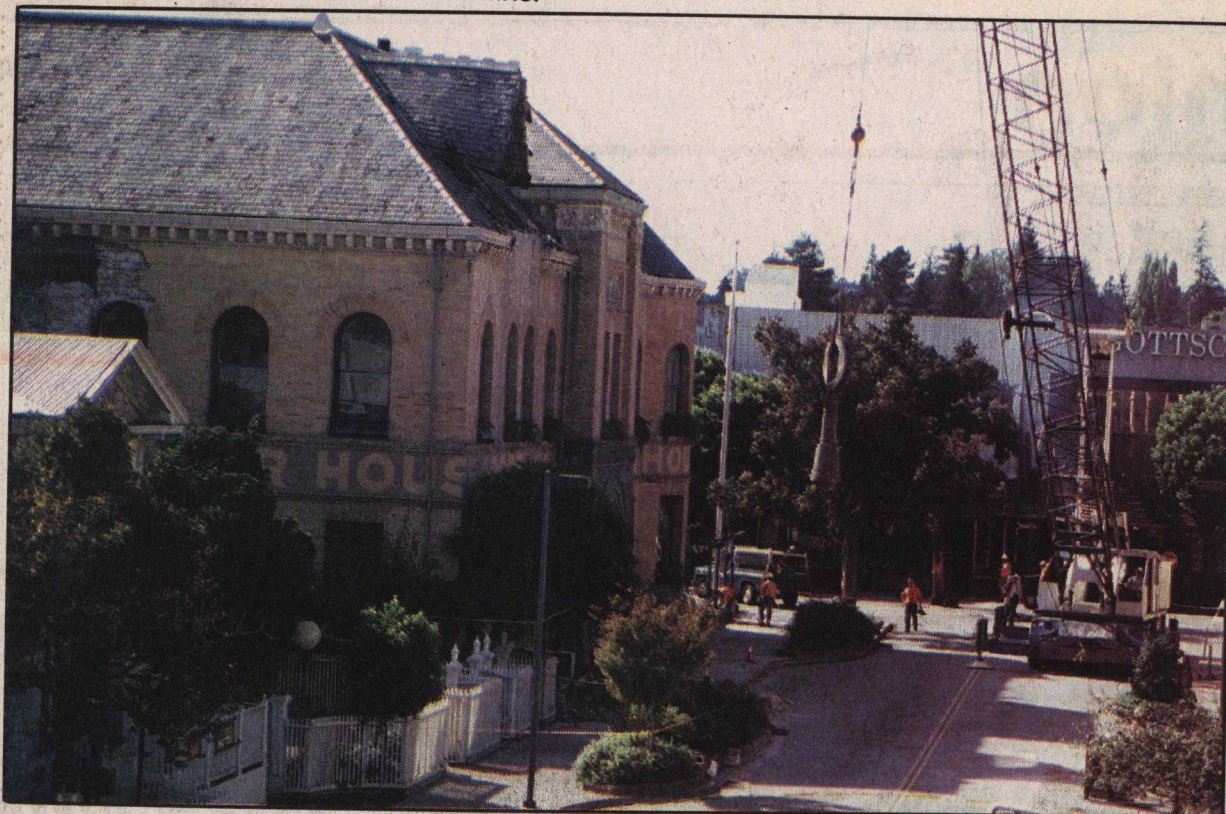
That's good news for city officials who believe a Santa Cruz downtown won't be complete until the Cooper House is rebuilt.

"Obviously, we are very glad to finally see some action on that site," said Mayor Cynthia Mathews. "It's probably the key site downtown, and one that's especially significant to the community because of its association with the Cooper House and all that has meant in the past."

The 94-year-old Cooper House, a former county courthouse that was transformed into a unique collection of shops and restaurants, was the source of an outpouring of community grief when it had to be demolished after the Oct. 17, 1989, earthquake.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

The Cooper House was torn down after the 1989 quake when it was declared beyond repair.

## Cooper House

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Shortly after the demolition, then City Councilman John Laird told the Sentinel: "I went down and stood in the crowd for awhile as the wrecking ball was knocking it down, and it was real tough not to well up (with tears) while it was happening. It was mostly quiet, as if it was a funeral, like part of the family went."

The 96,000-square-foot replacement project will feature four floors of office space above a ground floor filled with retail and restaurant space. The new structure would have dwarfed the old Cooper House, which was a mere 21,000 square feet.

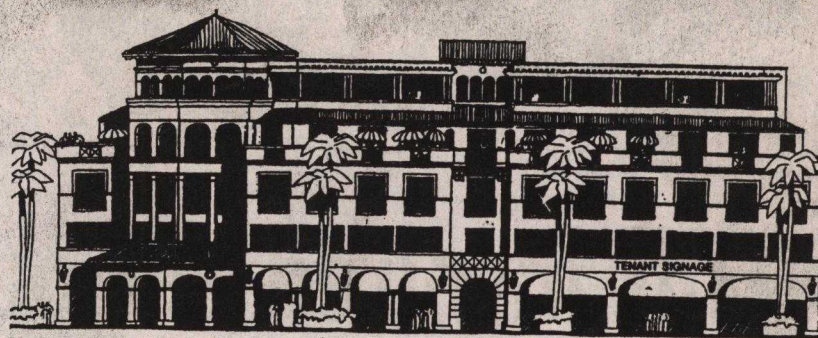
Paul, who bought the Cooper House 18 months before the earthquake, is expected to spend some \$8 million on his new project.

"He's a little nervous," said Stubendorff about Paul's decision to take out the building permit. "He's throwing the dice out there."

In April, Paul said he would begin construction even without the large office tenant that had been so elusive. Computer networking giant Cisco Systems had been expected to sign a lease, but negotiations fell through early this year.

"I think there's enough vitality in this economy ... that many companies, if they see a building up there, they will come," said Paul in a brief interview outside the Council Chamber in April. "(The building is) well designed, and it's a good location. ... This site is a key place in Santa Cruz. So, consequently, we're going to take the risk and step on out and do it."

Ceil Cirillo, executive director of the Redevelopment Agency, said she believes there are enough small technology firms in Santa Cruz that are bursting at the



An earlier drawing of the proposed replacement.

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seams to be optimistic that Paul will be able to fill the Cooper House with tenants once it is built.

"It's a significant milestone in the rebuilding of downtown," said Cirillo.

In an effort to kick-start the project in the past four years, the city's Redevelopment Agency committed \$1.3 million to offset parking fees over the next 10 years that downtown tenants normally would have to pay. That deal was slated to expire on Tuesday, the day Paul took out his building permit.

Among those who hope construction truly is beginning is Linda Steinau, executive director of the Downtown Association.

"I think we all know the old Cooper House was the heart of downtown," said Steinau. "It's the real, final linchpin in our recovery."

Although the new building will

have a Mediterranean flavor, there also will be touches that will remind people not only of the old Cooper House, but also the nearby Neary and Old County Bank buildings.

Stubendorff said these include the raised stone on the archways and the style of the window arches. Despite the fact the initial plans were submitted in 1991, said Stubendorff, the structure was required to comply with the latest building codes, including earthquake-safety mandates.

A pre-construction meeting is scheduled for mid-October so city officials and the contractor can "go over some ground rules," said Stubendorff.

Rudolph & Sletten of Foster City is the contractor on the building, which was designed by DES Architects of Redwood City.