

Historic HB Buildings Granted Stay Of Demolition

By Maresa Archer

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The historic tin buildings across from City Hall have received a stay of demolition.

The Bowen buildings stand on a parcel of land that is master planned by Pacific Coast Homes to become a residential community.

The Planning Commission was asked Tuesday night to approve development on the property that would destroy the buildings.

The developer requested destruction with a "statement of overriding consideration."

That means agreeing to the project with full knowledge that the buildings on the site are of

historic significance and deciding the proposed project benefits the city more than the tin buildings.

Planning commissioners were not willing to make that determination.

Commissioner Ed Mounford said he does not understand why the city does not have a plan to save the historic structures left in

Huntington Beach.

"I'm disappointed that the Redevelopment Agency didn't step in and take a leadership role in preserving historic buildings. They really dropped the ball.

"I don't see why something couldn't have been done to save these buildings."

Mounford cited Santa Ana's

policy to preserve any buildings of historic significance as one Huntington Beach should adopt.

"We're missing a golden opportunity to preserve our history."

In an effort to develop such a policy, the commission voted 5-1 to continue the decision on the Bowen buildings for 30 days.

During that time, planners will meet with City Council acting as the Redevelopment Agency to decide if saving historic structures should be a priority.

Commissioner Roger Slates went home ill early in the evening and did not vote.

The dissenting vote was cast by
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Historical Quandary...

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Commissioner Barry Williams.

"Our obligation is land use, it is not our job to be historians. These are just old tin buildings and old tin buildings go away, like old people go away and new ones are born," Williams said.

The three tin buildings on the southeast corner of Yorktown and Lake, were built in 1921 by Sam R. Bowen and used as manufacturing plants for oil well tools.

Instead of drilling for oil during the boom of the early 1920s, Bowen sought his fortune in businesses that serviced the industry, according to Barbara Milkovich, chair of the city's Historic Resources Board.

Bowen became a prominent figure in Huntington Beach and served as mayor in 1928.

Members of the Huntington Beach Historical Society suggested to council that the buildings could be renovated for housing, shops or a museum.

A similar set of buildings in Irvine were renovated to house three restaurants, a winery and a hotel, according to Milkovich.

A real estate broker attending

the meeting said he had a client who wanted to buy the property.

"He wants to buy the property and then ask for a zone change to use for something else, like the Irvine project," said Roger J. Niez, marketing associate with AIP Commercial Brokerage.

The Huntington Beach Co. owned the property since 1969, before transferring it to Pacific Coast Homes for development. Both companies are owned by Chevron Oil.

The developer approached the city last fall for permits to build 86 houses on the lot. The parcel is part of the city's redevelopment area.

City officials were convinced that the tin buildings had historical significance and so sectioned them away from the rest of the proposal, making them stand alone as a separate redevelopment project, according to Community Services Director Mike Adams.

"We did that to protect the buildings by making the developer start all over again with a whole new project," Adams said.

Not everyone agrees with the motives in splitting Pacific Coast



Independent Photo By Brian Mikes

BOWEN BUILDINGS — Historic buildings at Lake and Yorktown have received a temporary reprieve from the wrecking ball.

Home's plan into 80-unit and 6-unit projects.

Critics said the action violated the California Environmental Quality Act, which states that projects must be considered by their cumulative effects.

"What they did here was split the six off from the 80. Now,

saving three buildings when you're looking at reducing 86 to 80 is not a hardship to the developer.

"But refusing a developer six houses to save three tin buildings can be a hardship," said Bill Delvac, historic preservationist attorney and trustee for the Cali-

fornia Preservation Foundation.

Delvac said he does not believe the city intended to violate state act, but their actions have put the buildings in peril.

While Delvac is evaluating the city's action under the mandate, and the city is evaluating a possible preservation policy; the

developer is left in limbo.

"This portion of the project has already been delayed six months. I don't know how much longer we can continue holding the project," said Bill Holman, project manager for Pacific Coast Homes.