

BOB KITTLE

GLITZY HOTEL WOULD DESTROY CAYUCOS' FUNKY CHARACTER

This is to alert the good people of Cayucos that a dreadful plan to build an imposing, multi-story hotel on a fragile beach bluff in the heart of our town is making a comeback. In 2021 this woefully ill-advised project was sidelined by the Coastal Commission, but the developer has revived it in a second bid to gain approval.

In a blistering report, the Coastal Commission staff three years ago detailed the many ways the bulky, 20,114-square-foot hotel would harm Cayucos.

The site, just west of the pier, is a highly unstable ocean bluff subject to relentless erosion. But rising sea levels are not the only problem. The parcel is also bounded by Cayucos Creek, which eats away at the bluff face. Just this winter the bluff appears to have lost several feet due to king tides and the rushing torrent of Cayucos Creek during heavy rain storms. The site is composed of erosion-prone terrace deposits and fill dirt dumped on top of all kinds of debris. With all of the erosion, a huge truck tire now protrudes from the bluff.

The Coastal Commission report stresses that, due to the sensitive composition of the bluff, it “would erode easily and quickly if subjected to more regular wave attack and higher sea levels.” Because both the county’s Local Coastal Plan and the Coastal Commission prohibit the developer from protecting the site with riprap, rapid erosion is inevitable. The developer appears to recognize this by proposing to build a deeply embedded retaining wall around the hotel. Unsurprisingly, the retaining wall is a thinly veiled attempt to get around the prohibition against riprap on new development and is a violation of the Local Coastal Plan.

A hotel of this large scale would ordinarily require 77 parking spaces, but the county green-lighted it with only 21 parking spaces, in violation of the Local Coastal Plan. The Coastal Commission staff report notes that “hotel guests and employees will be forced into public parking spaces nearby, thus reducing and adversely affecting public beach parking opportunities.” Cayucos simply cannot afford to lose more street parking.

What’s more, the hotel’s monolithic, boxy design would obliterate public view corridors and would be glaringly incompatible with the unique, low-intensity character of our beloved beach town—and yet another violation of the Local Coastal Plan. It “would block nearly all existing public shoreline views from adjacent North Ocean Avenue, where these views are significant,” according to the staff report.

We and our neighbors are passionate about protecting the funky historic character of Cayucos. This so-called boutique hotel would destroy much of our town’s precious charm. As the Coastal Commission stated: “This site is located adjacent to the most significant natural resources in the entire community, namely the beach, the Pacific Ocean, and Cayucos Creek. These are community defining features and must be accounted for as well, including here where the

project would loom over, as opposed to blend into, the important natural Cayucos Creek viewshed....” The “rather bland” nature of the development would undermine “the existing characteristics of the community, including the community’s architectural aesthetic and natural features that add to the community’s attractiveness.”

The Coastal Commission long ago adopted an official policy of “planned retreat” all along the Pacific shoreline. Plopping down a massive new hotel right on the hazardous ocean’s edge would be folly, the very antithesis of planned retreat.

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Photo taken Feb. 20 shows rapidly eroding beach bluff at proposed hotel site. (I hope you can run this with the letter.)
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