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Historic SLO site on the market: Sunny Acres may see sunnier days ahead

Though county and city wanted to make it public use, the cost to repair is too high

By AnnMarie Comejo
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Sunny Acres, with Bishop Peak in the background, in 2003. JOE JOHNSTON — jjohnston@thetribunenews.com

The county received a green light Tuesday night to proceed with its plans to sell the historic Sunny Acres building so that it can be converted into a bluff-top home.

The San Luis Obispo City Council agreed with a 4-0 vote that the county's proposal to sell the property for residential use would be allowed under the city's land-use law. Councilman Dan Carpenter recused himself from the discussion because he lives in the area.

The dilapidated two-story brick building that was once an orphanage and later a county-run juvenile detention center, has been vacant for 37 years. It sits on the hilltop above the former San Luis Obispo General Hospital off Johnson Avenue, affording a view of the city that some say is unparalleled.

The building, known for its Romanesque architecture, is owned by the county of San Luis Obispo but is within city limits.

Both the county and the city have long advocated for preserving the historical nature of the building but vandalism and neglect have led to its near collapse.

County officials say they have long struggled to find a way to convert the building for public use. However, because of the high cost of needed repairs and earthquake-safety changes, it was not financially possible.

The building's looming demise prompted the county to declare the building as surplus and seek a buyer interested in converting the building into a home while preserving and restoring it.

On Tuesday, a handful of people urged the council to do what it could to stop the building from being transformed into a home, saying that it would be best used as a public facility.

Councilman John Ashbaugh argued vehemently that he would like to see a residential-care facility there.

However, Caryn Maddalena, the county's real-property manager, said that because there are more stringent retrofitting rules for buildings set for public use, the costs outweigh the potential benefits.

"If we want to save this building and keep it from collapsing, this is our option," Maddalena said.

The City Council also agreed to send a letter to the county asking that it develop an overall land-use plan for the site surrounding the building, including consideration of some residential development.

The council will discuss registering the Sunny Acres building on the city's list of historic resources at a future date.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2011/08/17/1720846/county-gets-ok-to-sell-historic.html#storylink=cpy>