

## MONTEREY PLACE APPROVED IN SLO



COURTESY RENDERING

The historic Leitcher House and Monterey Place redevelopment project is designed to improve a parcel in downtown San Luis Obispo.

# Downtown parcel poised for upgrade



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The dilapidated historic Leitcher House on Monterey Street adjacent to the Children's Museum will soon be transformed into a bed-and-breakfast, and the surrounding blighted area will be replaced by housing, retail shops and a restaurant.

The San Luis Obispo City Council approved the project, called Monterey Place, on a 4-1 vote Tuesday night. The project, being developed by Michael Hodge of Shear Edge De-

## Development near Children's Museum will include a bed-and-breakfast and four-story residential/commercial project

velopment is making its way through the city approval process since 2008.

It is one of the last large parcels of undeveloped land in the downtown area and the largest residential project to emerge in the area since the renovation of the Wineman Hotel in 2009.

The council's only caveat for approval Tuesday was to eliminate the potential for any late-night

clubs or bars at the site and to mandate that the one planned affordable home be built in the first phase.

Four new buildings will be constructed as part of Monterey Place, and the Leitcher House, built in the 1880s, will be preserved. The project will add 24,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground level and 23 residential units on the upper stories.

The new buildings, four stories high, will reach the 50-foot height limit allowed by the city.

A new feature to the city — mechanical lift parking in the basement — will be used for the condos.

However, the 29 parking spaces will only provide one space for each residential unit and five for the bed-and-breakfast visitors.

The lack of parking raised concerns from nearby residents.

The developer said he

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# Monterey

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intends to contract with the city to lease spaces at a city-owned parking lot across the street, which is eventually slated to become a parking structure.

A brick pedestrian paseo will be built in the center of the project to connect Monterey Street to the creek and Higuera Street. The walkway will be open to public access, but the developer retains the right to close it after 11 p.m.

The project gained a handful of detractors along the way, mostly with concerns about the height of the project and the impact of parking in an area where residents already struggle to find space for vehicles.

David Brodie, a member of Save Our Downtown, told the council Tuesday that the height of the buildings will block the view of the surrounding hillside and limit the use of the city's creek area to patrons of the development.

"The view of the hillsides should be the marker for San Luis Obispo and seen and celebrated from every part of the city," said Brodie. "This is a major civic project in a major civic area yet the word civic hasn't been used. ... I think that is criminal."

The height of the project is what led Councilwoman Kathy Smith to vote against the project.

"There is a viewshed problem for the residents, for those not living in the

condos, and I am really not happy about that," said Smith, adding that she would have supported it if it were one story lower.

Bill Walter, who owns the historic Bello House directly across the street from the project, said that he knows the area is in a transitional state.

"We need the residential density," said Walter. "Change is difficult, and it is going to be difficult for me. A funny thing happens on the way to change, you get used to it and you do the best you can."

Others expressed support for the project, saying it would bring a welcome mix of housing and commercial to the downtown.

Dominic Tartaglia, executive director of the San Luis Obispo Downtown Association, said the project meets the strategic goals of the association, including providing a safe and inviting space downtown for people to live while increasing commercial space.

"It will bring a new energy to a currently exhausted site," Tartaglia told the council Tuesday.

Councilman Dan Carpenter said that the project's restoration of the historic Leitcher House and the preserved open space created by the landscaped walkway leading to the creek were key aspects of the project that led to his approval.

"At the end of the day we have some sacrifices that we need to make to improve this blighted area," Carpenter said.