

Daily Breeze

Plans to bring 1920s San Pedro waterfront building back to life advances



The Hillcrest Company, has purchased the Harbor View House and plans to renovate the building into apartments with ground floor retail and entertainment while preserving the historical integrity of the 1920's gem in San Pedro on Thursday, September 19, 2019. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG)

By [Donna Littlejohn](#) | dlittlejohn@scng.com | Daily Breeze

PUBLISHED: September 23, 2019 at 4:47 pm | UPDATED: September 23, 2019 at 4:48 pm

Plans are moving forward to renovate what used to be Harbor View House — and, before that, the Army-Navy YMCA — into 100 apartments, two restaurants, a gym and a bowling alley/speakeasy that will feature live entertainment.

Maybe.

Los Angeles City Councilman Joe Buscaino, the San Pedro Chamber of Commerce, the San Pedro Bay Historical Society and all three neighborhood councils are on board.

City permits are all falling into place.

Still looming, though, is the question of whether the California Coastal Commission staff will decide to review the development based on appeals received. There is limited parking available on the site, which is located within the coastal zone. Developers have purchased a side lot next to the north side of the building, where about 50 surface spaces can be created for residents. But that won't be enough to provide parking for two cars per unit as called for, along with public parking for amenities open to non-residents, though developers are considering off-site valet parking as an option for public parking.

Coastal Commission staff has until the fall to make the call for review that would, developers say, likely kill the deal entirely if more parking would have to be provided.

“Any member of the public, our executive director or commissioners can appeal this,” Noaki Schwartz, Coastal Commission spokesman, said in an email. “On this project, we are mainly looking at parking and public access issues.”

Those issues are mostly related to ensuring the public has parking for and access to beach areas.



The Hillcrest Company, has purchased the Harbor View House and plans to renovate the building into apartments with ground floor retail and entertainment while preserving the historical integrity of the 1920's gem in San Pedro on Thursday, September 19, 2019. This former cafeteria area will be used for a high end restaurant. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press-Telegram/SCNG)

The developers argue that some 10,000 parking spaces are available for coastal access all along the waterfront, where there's the Battleship Iowa, Cabrillo Beach and what will become the San Pedro Public Market, replacing the now-demolished Ports O' Call Village.

For now, however, The Hillcrest Company, which purchased the former Harbor View House building for \$9.5 million in 2018, will push forward with what is classified as an [adaptive reuse project](#). Getting most of the needed city permits has already taken nearly a year.

If everything goes well moving forward, the project could be done within two or three years, said Ryan Afari, principal at The Hillcrest Company in Sherman Oaks.

"We have vast support from members of the community," he said.

The Hillcrest Company [purchased the building last year](#), Afari said.

Built in 1925, the Spanish Colonial Revival building, 921 S. Beacon St., first served as the Army and Navy YMCA from the 1920s through the 1950s, drawing thousands of servicemen through World War II and beyond. Lucille Ball was among the stars who performed onstage in a theater space inside the building.

Harbor View House took over the bluff-top, salmon-colored, five-story structure — overlooking the Port of Los Angeles' Main Channel — in the 1960s, providing apartments and services to more than 100 residents with mental illnesses. Los Angeles declared it a historic-cultural landmark in 1982.

The residents were relocated to other, smaller facilities in the region after HealthView Inc., which owned and operated Harbor View House, [sold the property](#).

Afari said the goal is to retain as much of the building's historical architecture as possible, including tiled walls and floors, archways, a vintage cafe and the gymnasium that features a basketball court and an elevated running track. The building is so ornate, it is often used for filming.

The cafe will be reopened, and another space off the lobby — the original mess hall, featuring a large fireplace with original, arched wood windows — will become a restaurant.

An outdoor dining patio space, with fire pits on the south side of the building, will also be created as part of the public restaurant.

“We really want to keep everything as original as possible,” Afari said.

Over the years, the upper floors have lost much of the building's original historic elements. That's where the 100 apartments will go, 10% of which will be set-aside for very low income residents.

The rental living spaces will offer different models and sizes, with pets allowed, Afari said.

In the past, the block was beset with some problems, including drug sales and other crimes. Drug dealers often would prey on the Harbor View House residents, the then-owners said at the time. There were frequent calls for police to come to the area.

The building has been empty since the first of the year. But now the block is dealing with a homeless encampment that's spreading south from the nearby U.S. Post Office.

As for the Coastal Commission wrinkle, Afari said, rehabilitating the building will result in increased coastal access and use, with the restaurants and some ground-floor commercial space drawing in new people.

“The irony is that this is about (providing) access to the coastline,” he said.