

Council unanimously supports Hofsas redo

By MARY SCHLEY

PLANS TO tear down a 75-plus-year-old San Carlos Street hotel and replace it can proceed, the Carmel City Council unanimously decided late last Tuesday night at the end of a lengthy meeting that included nearly an hour of debate on whether the hearing would take place at all. In April, the planning commission unanimously approved owner Carrie Theis’ proposal to demolish her family’s Bavarian-themed Hofsas House and replace it with a more contemporary, Craftsman-inspired hotel designed by architect Eric Miller. The new complex will contain the same number of rooms — 38, plus two apartments — but have fewer stories on the steeply sloping lot, and the plans protect Theis’ historic home on the property.

No delay

Following the commission’s vote, Carmel Preservation Association founder and avowed anti-contemporary activist Neal Kruse asked the city council to overturn the approval based on numerous environmental issues. The planning commission erred, he said, because it shouldn’t have allowed the project to be exempt from more extensive review. At the July 9 meeting, Kruse said he repeatedly asked for the hearing to be rescheduled because his attorney, Zan Henson, had a court hearing in San Jose the same day, but he did not get what he believed he was entitled to. Theis’ lawyer, Tony Lombardo, argued that his client had the right to have the matter heard and suggested Henson had plenty of time to get from his early-afternoon hearing in U.S. District Court in San Jose to Carmel City Hall, especially since the Hofsas House hearing was the



PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

The Hofsas House, located on one of the main arteries into town, can be torn down to make way for a new hotel, the city council says.

Back to the drawing board for decrepit police station

■ A saga full of twists and turns

By MARY SCHLEY

SEVEN YEARS after the discussion began, the Carmel City Council decided last Tuesday to take the police station remodel/expansion/demolition/new construction issue back to square one, again, with its 3-2 vote to look at options for remodeling and possibly expanding the 57-year-old building. The station has not aged well and has numerous deficiencies, including a significant lack of security, no safe facilities for handling evidence like highly toxic drugs, and nowhere to interview crime victims.

Committee divided

At the July 9 meeting, Police Chief Paul Tomasi presented three options for proceeding with the project by asking Indigo, the architect hired in June 2023 for \$300,000, to provide design schematics for rehabilitating and expanding “to accommodate the pragmatic functions of a contemporary police building,” to demolish it and build a new complex for CPD and the public works department at the same site, or to explore the feasibility of constructing a police station somewhere else. “Including this option would provide an additional cost analysis for comparison of the three options and help in the consideration of a final project,” he said. In addition to the full assessment of the building it already completed, Indigo is contracted for two schematics

They may be small, but they’re fierce



PHOTO/SUSAN LAMBERT

Four black-crowned night heron chicks band together after engaging in a fierce battle with an adult heron who tried to chase them from their nest. A docent was nearby to photograph the skirmish, which lasted over an hour. See page 10A.

last item on the agenda. He also said Henson could have submitted his comments in writing. “Their attorney could have made an effort to be here,” Theis said when it was her turn to speak. “My attorney had a case today, too, and he’s here.” She also said a lot of work went into preparing for the hearing. “We have people here to testify, to point out that this appeal should be denied, so we do not want a postponement,” she said. “It’s not fair to me, my project, my team and my family.”

Too late

Nearly a dozen people weighed in on both sides before the council sought clarity on the timeline and were told that Kruse and Henson had been advised June 4 that the hearing would be held July 9. They confirmed a few days later, according to staff, but then asked for the continuance June 24, the day before the required legal notice of the meeting was sent to The Pine Cone. “This is important, because I don’t like allegations that the city was unresponsive,” Mayor Dave Potter said. “June 24 is late to be postponing an item for the July agenda,” councilman Jeff Baron observed.

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RICHARDS DECIDES NOT TO SEEK REELECTION

By MARY SCHLEY

AFTER INITIALLY declaring his intent to run for election to a third four-year term, Carmel City Councilman Bobby Richards said this week he has changed his mind. Richards, who turned 60 last December, said he’s worked hard his whole life so he could enjoy himself in his later years, and now it’s time to do that. “For the past eight-and-a-half years, I haven’t been able to take more than two weeks off,” said Richards, who’s particularly fond of road trips and impromptu getaways. “I want to be able to walk out of my house right now and drive to Utah,” he said. “That’s what I’ve worked my whole life for.” In addition to his careers in hospitality and real estate,

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Woman, 80, killed at site locals have been warning about

■ No crosswalk at popular hiking spot

By CHRIS COUNTS

AN 80-YEAR-OLD woman who was killed Saturday crossing Highway 1 at Garrapata State Park in Big Sur has been identified as Gloria Danuta of Key Biscayne, Fla., according to the California Highway Patrol. The woman died at a spot that is a magnet for hikers who park their vehicles along the shoulder of the road and walk to four trailheads nearby. It’s also a spot locals have long complained is dangerous. The incident happened July 13 at 5:18 p.m. when a Ford F150 truck driven by Doris Lucha of Seaside collided with Johnson, who was walking across the pavement — a common activity at a site where parking is difficult and trailheads exist on both sides of the highway. “For reasons still under investigation, a pedestrian crossed from the west shoulder onto the northbound lane of SR-1, directly in the Ford’s path of travel,” the CHP reported. “The Ford was unable to avoid a crash with the pedestrian. The front of the Ford struck the pedestrian, who succumbed to her injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.”

Hub for hikers

Lucha and a passenger she was traveling with were uninjured. “Following the crash, Lucha remained on scene and was cooperative with the investigation,” the report continued. “Alcohol and/or drugs are not believed to be a factor in this crash.” The site where the pedestrian was killed is often congested, particularly on weekends, and hikers frequently

See **KILLED** page 25A

Sheriff stopped 3 times for dangerous speeding

■ 90 mph-plus, but no tickets issued

By KELLY NIX

MONTEREY COUNTY Sheriff Tina Nieto was pulled over for speeding three times within eight months — and refused to identify herself in one instance — but each time, California Highway Patrol officers let her go with only a warning. CHP dashcam footage shows officers stopping Nieto all three times in the King City area, including a day-time stop on Sept. 23, 2023, when she was pulled over in her Chevrolet SUV on the shoulder of what appears to be Highway 101. “When you passed me, you were at 95 and then you were in and out of traffic still up to about 90,” the officer says in the dashcam video provided to KION-TV, which first reported the story. The Pine Cone reviewed a portion of the footage for this article. Despite the excessive speed, the unidentified male CHP officer decided against citing her in favor of a caution. After learning he’d stopped the county sherriff, the



Tina Nieto

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