

Construction could begin soon at The Pit

By MARY SCHLEY

EVEN THOUGH it might feel like it, The Pit won't be The Pit forever. Patrice Pastor, whose company, Esperanza Carmel, owns the large property on the southwest corner of Dolores and Fifth, said this week that he has applied for a demolition permit to remove what the previous owners built so construction can finally begin on the mixed-use project approved by the planning commission in August 2023.

Since the vote

That unanimous approval of architect Henry Ruhnke's design for what will be called Ulrika Plaza was more than three years coming and marked a major step forward in Pastor's team's efforts to transform the blighted property, which has gone untouched since construction stopped

under its previous ownership in 2019.

But since that vote, nothing has changed at the site, and with the design approval set to expire next month, Pastor and his team would have had to apply for a time extension to keep it alive. Such extensions are not pro forma and could force another round of public hearings, but Esperanza Carmel applied for a permit for "demolition of an existing incomplete subterranean parking structure," keeping the design approval alive.

"We are eager to break ground on this project," Pastor told The Pine Cone. "With regards to the permit expiry, we applied for the demolition permit on Dec. 12, which qualifies for pulling a permit well in advance of this February expiry."

Pastor said the next phase will be to pull the full

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PHOTOS/(LEFT) KERRY BEISER, (ABOVE) ESPERANZA CARMEL

Jokes about the plans for a huge downtown swimming pool aside, the long dormant construction site at Dolores and Fifth (at left) should finally see some activity since its owner has applied for a demolition permit. The mixed-use design calls for Tudor and other styles (rendering above).

Highway 1 through Big Sur reaches sober milestone

Two-year closure sets record

By CHRIS COUNTS

AN UNHAPPY anniversary was reached last week when Highway 1 through Big Sur marked its second anniversary of being closed, making this the longest period motorists have been unable to drive along the coast between Carmel and Cambria since the Big Creek Bridge

opened to drivers in September 1938.

As a result, businesses down the coast have struggled to survive, while road crews work long hours to reopen the highway, which has been plagued by slides since major storms shut it in January 2023.

This week, The Pine Cone reached out to a number of Big Sur inns and businesses about the hurdles they have faced staying open — and why this might be the best time to visit the spectacular, but sometimes inaccessible or over-visited, scenic area south of Carmel.

For now, about 40 miles of coastline south of Rio Road is accessible with minor delays for road work, making it possible to visit most of Big Sur's parks, resorts and shops.

The long view

Nepenthe restaurant general manager Kirk Gafill said his family's restaurant loses about a third of its visitors every time the highway closes from the south.

"The challenge is sustaining losses during a period like this, especially with an unknown timeline," Gafill said.

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1,000 ASK PANETTA FOR INAUGURATION TICKETS

By KELLY NIX

THERE HAS been an overwhelming demand in requests from constituents in the 19th Congressional District for tickets to President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration in Washington D.C., according to Democratic Rep. Jimmy Panetta, who will attend the historic event.

Panetta, who was also at Trump's first inauguration in 2017 and President Joe Biden's in 2021, told The Pine Cone Wednesday that demand for the inaugural event on Jan. 20 has been extremely high.

"We are getting an overwhelming number of requests for unfortunately a limited number of tickets that we have," Panetta said. "I think it's about a 5-to-1 request for tickets. We have received more than 1,000 requests for 198 tickets that each member of Congress gets."

Panetta said there have been more requests for passes

Commission dithers over metal roofs

L.A. fires add urgency to debate

By MARY SCHLEY

WITH THE widespread destruction of thousands of homes and other buildings — including schools and businesses — in the Southern California wildfires, along with the loss of lives and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, the possibility, if not the inevitability, of wildfire in Carmel is on everyone's mind.

In light of that, the battle over metal roofs continued at Wednesday night's planning commission meeting when, after a nearly two-hour discussion on the topic in general, commissioners OK'd one but denied two others.

As the number of applications for such roofs, mostly with vertical panels connected by raised seams, has increased due to fire worries and insurance woes, the commission has struggled with the issue. While residential design guidelines state that "metal, plastic and glass roofs are inappropriate in all neighborhoods," they are not illegal and can therefore be approved when commissioners determine the architecture and neighborhood context warrant it, associate planner Jake Olander noted.

'It doesn't do any good to preserve the character if it all burns down'

'Expressed distaste'

While far less common than the traditional wood shake roofs — which have become anathema in the worlds of property insurance and fire risk — metal roofs appear on many homes, and some have had them for decades.

But a spate of more recent approvals has sparked controversy, so planning staff has been referring all roofing applications that call for metal, composite shingles and

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PHOTO/YAHOO NEWS

A metal-roofed house in Lahaina, Hawaii, drew international attention after surviving the fire that devastated the town in August 2023.

Making way for animals left homeless by fires



PHOTO/SPCA MONTEREY COUNTY

An SPCA worker holds Lyle, a 1-year-old terrier mix it's caring for to make room in shelters down south, which are getting pets that had to be evacuated from the fires. See page 5A.