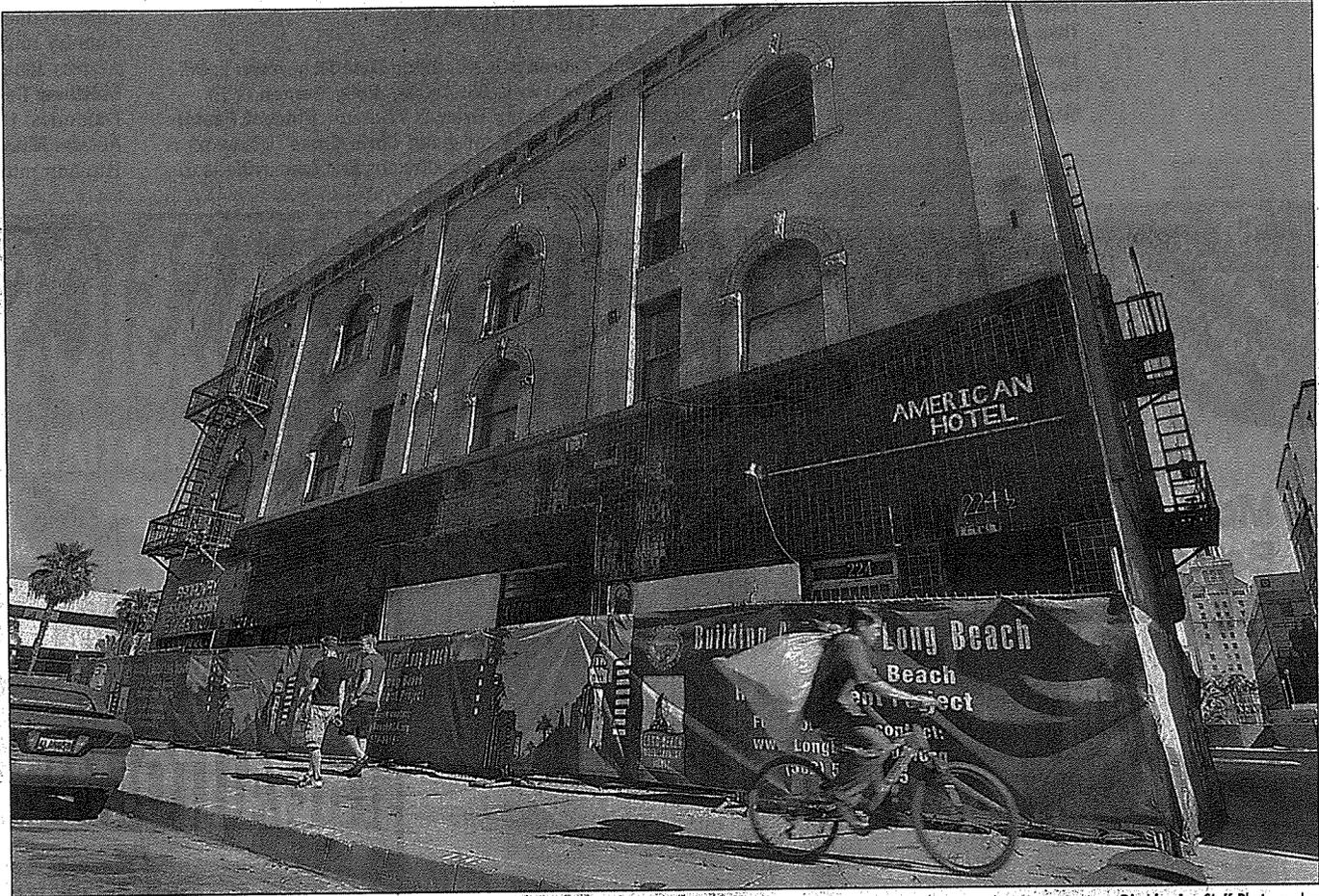


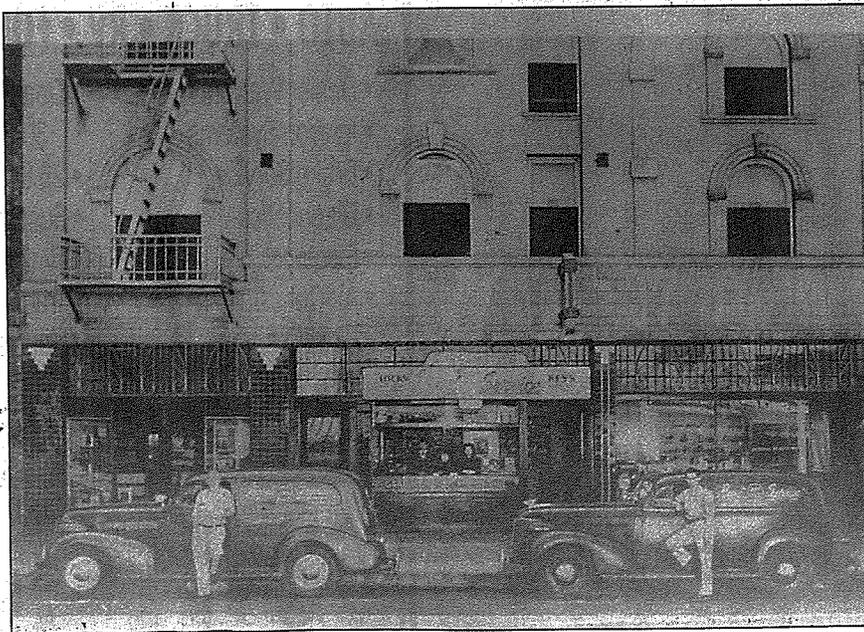
Who'll revive American Hotel?

RDA considers the historic site key to uniting areas of downtown Long Beach



Diandra Jay Staff Photographer

The building that became the American Hotel was built in 1905 to be the home of the Society of New or Practical Psychology, but in 1911 it became a single-room occupancy hotel. Officials estimate it will take about \$11 million to make the building structurally sound.



File photo

The American Hotel on East Broadway served the city for years as a single-room occupancy hotel, but it eventually became a blight on the community, which led to the Redevelopment Agency's purchase of the site in 2000 for \$300,000.

By Karen Robes Meeks Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Hoping to save all or part of one of the city's oldest commercial buildings and create a link to other areas of downtown, redevelopment officials are in pursuit of those who can revive the nearly 104-year-old American Hotel.

The Long Beach Redevelopment Agency is looking for proposals from developers who can preserve or reuse the 224-230 East Broadway structure, considered to be the city's second oldest commercial building documented.

"It would be great to be able to reactivate that building and continue some of the redevelopment efforts in that area," said Development Services Director Craig Beck. "If you think about Broadway and as you head east ... you hit (new developments such as) the Promenade 133 and Pacifica and then American Hotel, it feels like you've left the downtown, in a sense."

Developing a project at American Hotel is expected to re-energize that space and connect it to the Broadway Block development, where an ArtExchange arts center is being proposed at the former Acres of Books property at 240 Long Beach Blvd.

"This is a prime candidate for adaptive reuse," said John Thomas, agency board member and Long Beach Heritage president. "It's taking a

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unique, historical, architectural feature like this building and allow it to be re-themed and to energize an area.

"In this case, we're talking about a major intersection of Long Beach and the conduit between Pine Avenue and the East Village, to be part of the hub that connects the creative arts to downtown businesses, restaurants and retail."

Built in 1905, the building — a Romanesque Revival style made popular in the 1890s — was commissioned by William C. Price, who wanted a "psychic Temple" for the Society of New or Practical Psychology, according to Long Beach Heritage.

After Anna Sewell bought the property for \$2,910.09 in 1911, it became The American House, a single-room occupancy hotel.

The building, which the City Council declared a historic landmark in 1989, became a source of blight, attracting criminal activity downtown.

The agency purchased the property for \$300,000 in 2000 in hopes of finding a new use for the building.

Developers in the past eyed American Hotel. The Los Angeles Council of American Youth Hostels proposed — but was unable to secure financing for — an \$8 million, 200-bed facility that would also house its regional headquarters in 1998.

The agency had brought in Artspace, a nonprofit real

estate developer with experience in building artists' lofts. Artspace looked at the building and chose not to move forward with the idea, Beck said.

The developer looking to build a loft-inspired Starwood boutique hotel, "aloft," next to the American Hotel building, also envisioned American Hotel as a meeting space to complement "aloft." But the cost of rehabilitating the property proved too costly, prompting the "aloft" developer to move forward without American Hotel, Beck said.

Part of the challenge will be updating the building. A preliminary total to make it structurally sound — upgrading the building's utilities, making it safer from earthquakes — reached \$11 million, Beck said.

But if a developer is successful, Thomas said the project will be a "home run" for the city that saves a historic structure and creates an important downtown connection.

"That's a baseball game I'd like to play," he said.

karen.robles@presstelegram.com,
562-499-1303