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New plans show look is same for tower

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Sunroad dismantling continues; wing stays

By David Hasemyer

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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New architectural plans have been drawn up for the Sunroad Enterprises office tower near Montgomery Field, and a picture is emerging of how the controversial tower will be lowered 20 feet to comply with Federal Aviation Administration safety standards.

To meet the 160-foot height limit imposed by the FAA, Sunroad has told the city it will demolish an elevator utility room on the roof and then remove the top floor of the 12-story building.

When all the work is finished the building will look pretty much as originally designed, because the company has decided to save the flying bridge, the building's architectural and visual signature. Crews will dismantle the bridge and use a crane to lower the pieces to the ground. After the 12th floor is removed, the ornamental wing will be hauled back up and re-attached.

The deconstruction isn't nearly the colossal task it appears, said Ken Walsh, director of San Diego State University's construction engineering program. Walsh described it as more of a logistical headache than an engineering feat.

"The deconstruction isn't rocket science," he said. "Technically it isn't very challenging. It's almost construction work in reverse.

"What it is is unique. It's not often that deconstruction work on this scale is called for."

Kelly Broughton, assistant director of San Diego's Development Services Department, called the effort a "huge undertaking" that is expected to cost \$1.1 million.

So far, Sunroad is adhering to the demolition schedule set by development services and the City Attorney's Office, and the work is expected to be finished by mid-November. The reconstruction will begin then, with completion expected in early 2008. The building originally was scheduled to open earlier this year.

Sunroad's office tower dominates the Kearny Mesa skyline and is situated less than a mile from the Montgomery Field runway near state Route 163 and Clairemont Mesa Boulevard.

The FAA notified the company last year that the building would be a hazard to airplanes landing in bad weather if it exceeded 160 feet. Sunroad proceeded as planned for a

Developments

Background: Last year, the Federal

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taller building, violating the FAA safety standards, saying the city had granted permits for a 180-foot building.

Mayor Jerry Sanders finally ordered construction halted in June, after his office had quietly tried for months to find a solution that would allow the building to remain 180 feet high.

A few weeks later Sunroad decided to comply with the mayor's order. It also vowed to press ahead with a \$40 million lawsuit against the city to recover deconstruction costs and lost revenue.

In a July interview, Sunroad owner Aaron Feldman said the decorative wing would have to be scrapped from the building, leaving the newly configured building "more of a box than anything else."

The plans now call for the wing to remain. It is a feature Feldman said he hoped would make passers-by feel good because they would see "something that is pretty."

Sunroad spokeswoman Karen Hutchens said the company is going to remain silent during the deconstruction.

"I don't have a whole lot to share," Hutchens said. "The process is continuing along as is planned with the city. I wish I could be more help but that's the way it is."

So far, most of the deconstruction effort has been on the building's interior, but there are outward signs that work is progressing.

Glass wall panels and pieces of ornamental stone have been stripped from a section of the building so that an exterior elevator can be erected to haul the massive heating and air-conditioning units down from the roof.

Huge, protruding beams have been installed around the 10th floor to support the scaffolding from which the dismantling will be done. In the next few days all the glass and stone facade should be stripped from the top of the building, exposing the steel super structure.

The wing probably will be hauled down by the middle of this month, and in October work should begin to remove the steel frame of the 12th floor. Cutting torches will be used if the beams can't be unbolted, Broughton said.

Crews are busy inside, severing connections between the top of the building and the lower floors. Electrical wires will be cut, water and sewer pipes capped, and heating and air-conditioning ducts rerouted.

The biggest design change won't be visible from the outside, Broughton said. It involves the main elevator, which must be reconfigured to make room for the hoist equipment that was once on the roof. The elevator now will stop on the ninth floor, and a second, smaller elevator will be installed to take the building's future tenants to the 10th and 11th floors.

Aviation Administration declared the Sunroad building a hazard to airplanes landing in bad weather at Montgomery Field in Kearny Mesa. The agency said the 180-foot building was 20 feet too tall. After resisting demands to lower the building for nearly a year, Sunroad agreed to meet FAA standards.

What's happening: Construction crews have begun removing some of the glass walls and stone siding, and installing steel girders that will be used as platform for the scaffolding needed to perform the work.

The future: Crews should begin removing the decorative wing from the top of the building by mid-September the 12th floor by October. Demolition is expected to be finished by mid-November.

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