

## Downie, Chelsea

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**From:** sbcob  
**Subject:** FW: Staff recommendation to deny appeal: 777 Camino Pescadero, Isla Vista, CA

April 25, 2012

Clerk of the Board  
Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Barbara

Dear Clerk of the Board:

Would you please include this e-mail in the board packet for the County of Santa Barbara Supervisor's meeting scheduled for May 1, 2012?

I am writing to support the **county staffs' recommendation to deny the appeal** of the renovation permits for the Thomas Merton House, located at 777 Camino Pescadero in Isla Vista, California.

For over 14 years, I served on the board of directors for the University Religious Conference of Santa Barbara (URC), a non-profit organization whose mission was to promote interfaith understanding in Isla Vista and the surrounding community. For nearly 50 years, the URC sponsored activities for students, staff and faculty from UC Santa Barbara and other residents of the Isla Vista. In the 1960s, URC members constructed their own building in Isla Vista, the University Religious Center, located at 777 Camino Pescadero, and over the years the Center was used by numerous religious, non-profit and governmental organizations. The auditorium was--and continues to be--one of the only large meeting spaces available in Isla Vista; it is a core community asset.

Following several years of careful consideration, the URC board dissolved its organization in 2011 and voted to sell its primary asset, the University Religious Center, to the Santa Barbara Student Housing Coop (SBSHC), an Isla Vista non-profit with a 35+ year history in Isla Vista. The SBSHC was selected to continue the interfaith legacy of the URC: the URC sold its building to the SBSHC and the new owners unanimously agreed to develop a student residence with an interfaith theme, reflecting the URC's original mission of interfaith understanding. The "old" URC is now named the Thomas Merton House, in honor of the 20th century Trappist monk and writer on topics of ecumenism, peace and justice.

In addition to the goal of renovating the building to create an affordable student residence, community residents will benefit, too, from the social and cultural activities that will occur in this new interfaith-themed coop. The Thomas Merton House will continue to provide access to its large meeting space for use by community members and organizations, such as the Isla Vista Community Network.

I understand that the project to renovate the Thomas Merton House was unanimously approved by the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission on December 7, 2011, an approval required so that final permits could be issued. The SBSHC has worked diligently to ensure that it meets the legal requirements for the necessary permits, including the identification of sufficient vehicle parking arrangements. The county staff has recognized their steadfast progress.

I respectfully ask you to affirm the staff's recommendation to deny the appeal, so that the Thomas Merton House renovation project can move forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Catherine Boyer  
3815 La Cumbre Hills Lane  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110

