

Aptos residents are critical of village development plan

By CAROLYN
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There are some Aptos residents who would like to blow the whistle on portions of the Aptos Village Junction Plan, a development proposal for a business-commercial-residential complex in the central heart of the village.

Aptos Constituents for the Environment (ACE) is one local organization unhappy with the development's potential for an increased tie-up in traffic.

Nancy Howells, resident of the rural Trout Gulch area, said ACE is worried the proposal will fail to adequately address the bottleneck traffic problems that already exist in Aptos Village, and fears the situation may only get worse when the recommended changes are made.

The Aptos Village Junction project site is southwest of Granite Way and 355-feet west of Cathedral Drive — roughly on the area behind the Bay View Hotel and next to the Hopkins Right-of-way entrance to the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

Sands Associates, Inc. of Los Gatos is applicant for the development which calls for neighborhood commercial use of some 31,048 square-feet, plus 4-5 units of professional office space to total about 2,480 square-feet. The project also includes 17 studio and one-bedroom apartment units in the commercial complex, and another eight units on the hillside. Available parking for the commercial area totals about 184 spaces or 36,800 square-feet.

According to Mrs. Howells, the proposed solutions to the traffic pressures detailed in the project may make it more difficult for residents in surrounding neighborhoods to travel through the village. She said most ACE members are also members of a local road association in the Trout Gulch area. Since they make daily trips through the village, the members are keenly interested in traffic patterns, and feel their concerns are shared by residents in all of Aptos.

ACE members meet infrequently, Mrs. Howells said, but were compelled, nonetheless, to compose a joint statement about their opinions on the development proposal. This letter was submitted as public comment to be included in the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) now being written for the plan.

County planner Jim Weaver said the draft EIR released in November is now under revision before presentation to the county Planning Commission. Public comment received before the deadline will be a part of the final EIR, and residents will eventually have another chance to speak up at a public hearing before the commission. However, Weaver said no hearing will be scheduled until the document is finished, and the commission's agenda is already full for the next several months.

Elgar Hill of Environmental Analysis and Planning of Sausalito prepared the EIR for the project. Architect is Steve Titus of Ellmore-Titus Architects, Inc. of Santa Cruz, and Fred Wermuller of Bowman-Williams Engineers is the project engineer.

The main commercial-residential-professional office complex is to be on flatter ground to the south of Granite Way, and will take its theme from the nearby Village Fair. There will be one and two-story wood roofed and board and batten sided barnlike structures with commercial space on the ground floor and professional offices or apartments upstairs. These will be built with a series of landscaped common areas.

Much of the proposal for Aptos Village Junction follows the recommendations of the Aptos Village Plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors. However, when the plan was adopted, the circulation element was overlooked, pending additional discussion and study by Aptos citizens.

No major improvements are presently budgeted by the county for existing roadways in the Aptos Village area. The village plan recommends extension and improvement of Granite Way to serve as a north peripheral road to relieve existing and future traffic in the village.

The possibility of extending Granite Way northeastward to connect with Trout Gulch in the vicinity of Quail Run Road was eliminated by construction of the Aptos Post Office.

A planned development permit granted by the county for the Aptos Station development also requires improvements to the entrance road to the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

The Developer of Aptos Station proposal agreed to make an offer of dedication to the county after the improvements were completed. The county would then be required to apply to the Public Utilities Commission for a crossing permit at the SP tracks.

The big wrinkle in this plan is the state's position on development of the Hopkins Road park entrance. The Forest of Nisene Marks Park Advisory Committee reports that the state sent several letters which clearly establish that the county has no jurisdiction over the road, and is therefore in no position to make deals for improvements.

The state's position is that it claims ownership, and nothing can be done to the road without its permission — which it doesn't intend to give. It will take action by the State Legislature before the county can make any change in the road's present condition.

As a general mitigation, the EIR suggests that improvement of the peripheral road system may require an assessment district of county "improvement area fund," with standards of improvement subject to the requirements of the county, pending adoption of the Aptos Village Plan circulation element.

Another recommendation is that village land should be restricted from through-traffic from the Mar Vista-Cathedral Drive area.

"Access from this road to the hillside apartment units should be dependent upon granting of a legal right-of-way, and the requirement of adequate improvements, including drainage facilities in accord with county design standards," the consultant said, "At the present time, access to the hillside apartments is recommended directly from Granite Way along the eastern portion of the project site."

The Aptos Village Junction EIR notes that the Trout Gulch-Soquel Drive intersection is the most important "traffic node" in the village area because of the magnitude of turning movements. Hourly turning counts during peak hours of 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. were taken in 1975 and 1979, and these show a significant increase in left turn movement.

"The Trout Gulch-Cathedral Drive intersection will require careful consideration in the future because of traffic generated by the Post Office," Hill said, "There is restricted sight distance along Trout Gulch Road at this intersection which makes turning somewhat hazardous."

Traffic analysis for Aptos Village Plan presented two basic alternative solutions — a one-way loop system and two-way network.

Aptos Village Junction Plan shows a one-way access on Granite Way from Cathedral Drive with egress via Hopkins Road to Soquel Drive, and this is one of the recommended circulation alternatives in the village design study.

The project will generate about 2,800 trips per day, consistent with design study projections of 700 trips per acre. During the peak hour, up to 300 vehicles would enter or leave the development along Granite Way.

Traffic which moved southbound on Trout Gulch Road to Soquel Drive would also be re-routed via Granite Way to Hopkins Road-Soquel Drive intersection. Incoming peak hour traffic to this intersection would be 420-450 vehicles.

According to Mrs. Howells, the re-routing of traffic along Granite Way in a one-way pattern is one of the major objections of uplands residents.

"People traveling down Cathedral Drive would have to go all the way around the village on the one-way traffic pattern before they could get to the post office," she said.

The consultants state that the one-way system requires several improvements but is the more efficient alternative.

In addition to the long drive to the Post Office for some residents, the disadvantages of the one-way system include an increased potential of accidents; increased signs and improvements; and "one-way streets appear to be out of character with sense of community scale and form," Hill said.

If the one-way system is initiated, the EIR draft also recommends a number of improvements for off-site intersections and roadways. These include widening of Soquel Drive to allow a partial two-way stop, left turn and stacking lanes at Soquel Drive and Trout Gulch Road.

Further widening of Soquel Drive to three lanes between Trout Gulch Road intersection and Hopkins Road is also recommended.

Additional changes suggested for the one-way system include:

—Changing Aptos Street to one-way, westbound.

—Installation of a crossing gate at the railroad track when the project is fully built-out.

—Widening of the intersection at Cathedral Drive to allow free movement to Granite Way.

—A stop sign, left turn and stacking lanes on Hopkins Road, with an eventual three-way stop required.

Mrs. Howells said that ACE has also wondered about the impact of traffic at Spreckels Drive-Soquel Drive intersection, the traffic load on the bridge, and the county's authority on the state park entrance road.

"I now feel this area is in for another great change," she said, "The village is the center of our community, and we want to see that the changes are done right. If all these things happen at once, we may find ourselves living in a very different kind of community."

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