

Scotts Valley's future tied to developments

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SCOTTS VALLEY — If new City Manager Chuck Comstock's dream is realized, the word "Skypark" will someday mean more than the site of a defunct airport.

"When you say 'the mall' you think of Capitola," Comstock told an early morning meeting of the Scotts Valley Kiwanis Club Wednesday.

Addressing "New Directions for Scotts Valley," Comstock said that someday, he hopes, "Skypark" will mean 'Scotts Valley' in people's minds."

Skypark is a proposed development for the mid-town site where the city of Santa Cruz once had its airport.

Plans for the development include shops and businesses, houses, parks and schools.

Envisioning a "premium retail outlet," Comstock said the development is "an opportunity to put Scotts Valley on the map."

Skypark is one of three major proposed developments that Comstock said will shape the city's future, adding diversity to its economic base, tax revenues to its coffers and an increased need for the services provided by government.

The two other projects are the Borland International world headquarters, proposed for the former Santa's Village property, and the Glenwood Estates project, a proposed 276-unit housing development that would wrap around an 18-hole golf course across Highway 17 from the Borland project.

Most cities see one development like this about once in five years, Comstock said, but Scotts Valley

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has three going at once.

He said the city staff is somewhat overwhelmed with the volume of work because the three projects are underway at the same time, but that the importance of the three projects can't be underestimated.

"Everything else piggybacks on these three projects," said Comstock. "The staff's commitment is to make this happen."

All three projects will contribute to the city's tax base, he said, but two of the projects are especially important to the city's redevelopment plans.

Both the Borland and Skypark projects are located within the boundaries of the city's redevelopment agency. As both are developed, and the property appreciates, some of the increased tax revenues from the properties will funnel into

the city's redevelopment accounts.

That money will be used for long-overdue improvements to Scotts Valley Drive, one of the city's two major traffic arteries, Comstock said.

In turn, those street improvements will help generate increased commercial business on Scotts Valley Drive.

The developments will not be without their cost to the city, he said.

"Once completed, they will dictate where we have to go to maintain the levels of service for the increased employees," Comstock said. "The new dilemma is how to maintain current levels of services. It's very difficult in these times without some type of tax increase."

The city is looking at a variety of ways to do this, he said, including contracting out some city services.

Comstock cited the example of an \$11,000 mower the city has budgeted to buy for Siltanen Park. It may be cheaper to get the grass mowed by contracting the job to a private business, he said.

The city's problems are echoed across the nation, he said, noting that a number of cities are going bankrupt, and that many areas have school funding problems and major job layoffs to deal with as well.

"It will make cities become more business-like," Comstock predicted. "We'll have to look at the cost of services and where the revenues will come from."

He said the city is considering appointing a citizen finance committee to look at some of those questions.

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9-12-91

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