

SV Planners Are Fighting To Follow The Book

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High on a wind-swept, tree-studded hill off Scott Valley Drive and Quien Sabe Road in Scotts Valley stands an expanse of acreage patiently waiting for development to come.

The native trees still encircle the picturesque property, but already there are signs of the coming development - grading (which has been red-tagged as illegal), evidence of future streets and water pipes. All are being readied for some 15 homes planned for the approximate 22 total acres.

The Quien Sabe area, set aside as a priority area for the general plan review, is only an example of the development entering the once rural Scotts Valley.

But it is a unique example. It is an example of city planners fighting to follow the book, of city officials questioning whether its future as indicated on the general plan is appropriate and of anxious developers who want their property working for them and who are uniquely concerned about their impact on the idyllic spot.

The requests by the several developers in the area have appeared regularly on city council and planning commission agendas over the past several months. The question of Quien Sabe's future came to a head at a recent planning commission meeting where commissioners were faced with four requests for lot splits in the area.

City planners, under the auspices of Community Development Director Jack Schenk, recommended that the commissioners hold off on the lot split requests, citing that the area was up for general plan review and pointing out various geological problems and possible zoning ordinance violations.

Despite their concerns, the commissioners approved the recommendation of a four-lot split of 5.5 acres owned by Jerry Pike and asked the staff to bring back the appropriate conditions for three requests creating a total of nine new lots.

Referring to all the lot split requests, Schenk told the planning commission, "One of the reasons the commission ordered a study of this area was to determine what the holding capacity of the land really is. In advance of that study, I believe any action on this property is premature."

"If you're going to allow the subdivision in advance of the study, you really don't need the study," he added.

The current general plan calls for medium density residential with 7-14 dwelling units per acre. A portion near Scotts Valley Drive is designated for commercial.

Although some may be worried that the property will be developed with multiple residential buildings, most of the developers have indicated they plan to build single-family homes.

Pike and fellow developer, Ben Hatten, in fact, had their combined 14 acres changed from a multiple and agricultural zones where

90 units would have been allowed to an R-1-10 (single family residential) zone where a maximum of 56 units are possible. Hatten and Pike together only plan eight homes, two of which are already in existence.

In approving Hatten's lot split, the city council safeguarded against any further development by saying that if the four current lots are split any further, Hatten will have to put in sewers instead of septic systems. The same condition has been suggested for Pike.

In recommending a hold on all lot split requests in the Quien Sabe area, Schenk pointed out various problems with the property.

With Pike, he said that a proposed road would split one parcel in half and two of the parcels front a very steep slope down to Scotts Valley Drive. These two parcels also are in conflict with the zoning ordinance which states that the site depth cannot exceed three times its width.

Schenk also pointed out that landslide areas and soil creep are shown on the seismic safety element of the general plan for the rear portion of the property which fronts on an old granite quarry.

These fears were laid to rest by Attorney Robert Haight, speaking for Pike, who said that the two lots were unusually long because their front portions sloped to Scotts Valley Drive. He said Pike would be willing to dedicate these wooded slopes as open space in order to make the parcels meet the zoning requirement.

Haight also presented the commission with a newly drawn map which excluded the questionable roadway. Recently a large section of the Quien Sabe area was graded without a permit and Haight explained that this was done so the water district could lay its pipes.

He disagreed that Pikes' proposal was premature, saying, "I think it's here, I think it's now and you're talking about the density of development. Well, if any of you gentlemen have been out on these parcels, you'll find two beautiful building sites."

Pike said he was not worried about the seismic hazards since he didn't plan to build anywhere near the quarry.

The commission also was faced with three requests to split three parcels into nine. All of the developers, John Wessels, Melvin Johansen and Howard Norton, emphasize they are planning to build single family homes although their property is zoned for multiples. Wessels, however, with a potential parcel on Scotts Valley Drive, is also thinking of requesting a commercial site.

Other property owners include Joe Isen who plans to build one home on his one acre and the Strong family who own about 6.5 acres and originally owned the entire site. They are thinking of building a commercial building down on Scotts Valley Drive, but have no plans for the rest of their property.

The Book

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Water pipes, resting on illegally graded streets, lie in anticipation of the approximately 15 homes they could serve on the acreage off Scotts Valley's Quien Sabe Road.