

Live Oak - 1990

Community activists support Mid-County shopping center

By KATHY KREIGER
Sentinel staff writer

LIVE OAK — A proposed Mid-County shopping center may not sit well with neighboring businesses and homeowners. But black community activists and some business owners gave it a big thumbs up Tuesday.

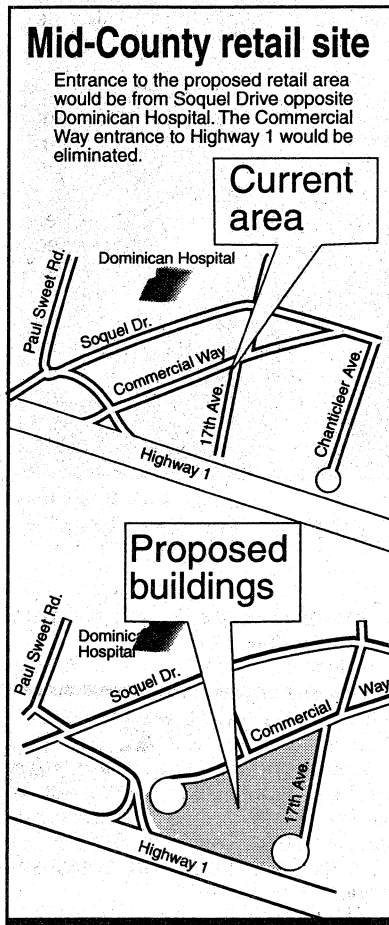
A center could bring chain retailers such as Circuit City or Toys R Us to the county, which would mean jobs for Santa Cruz residents, economic development for the business community and more sales taxes for county government. That was the message delivered Tuesday to the county Board of Supervisors, which decided to wait two months for more traffic studies before going forward.

"We talk about unemployment, we talk about homelessness, we talk about people on the street," said Esther Bradley Delgado, food pantry manager and 32-year county resident. "Well, then let's develop and bring some jobs."

Previous discussions of the shopping center proposed for the Commercial Way area between Dominican Hospital and Highway 1 have focused on objections from surrounding small businesses. Under a previous plan for the area, some of those properties were targeted for purchase and redevelopment into a larger retail center.

Earlier this year, however, supervisors bowed to the merchants' concerns by scaling back the size of the project from more than 10 acres to 5½. Redevelopment agency planners originally suggested 117,000 square feet of stores; the smaller property would allow for 75,000 square feet.

At that time, county Supervisor



Chris Carothers/Sentinel

Mardi Wormhoudt said that unless someone spoke up in its favor, the project was probably doomed.

Tuesday, Wormhoudt and the rest of the supervisors heard from those who want it.

Community activists showed up, as they did when the Santa Cruz City Council was weighing the Westside Longs Drugs store, also

opposed by neighbors. They told the supervisors why they think the project is important to the larger community.

Delgado said she was excited when she heard the project would mean 150 jobs — as well as the employment created by building it.

Besides jobs, proponents said, the project also would capture the millions of dollars that leave the county each year when local residents shop in San Jose or other out-of-county areas.

"Why not leave our tax dollars here, where we live?" Delgado asked the supervisors.

The project would help, not hurt, small businesses in the area, said Jeff Payne, a vice president with Comerica Bank.

"If you can keep people from traveling over the hill, it's going to be very beneficial to other businesses," Payne said.

Curtis Brown, 19, told the supervisors he supports the project.

"It would be good for teen-agers, who have a hard time finding a job other than fast food," said Brown, a graduate of Soquel High School.

RedTree Properties, which owns the major piece of property in the proposed center, has been trying to develop its project for four years, said representative John Swift.

Swift handed the supervisors petitions supporting the project signed by 125 people. He also noted some 20 letters of support from people who live in Aptos, Santa Cruz and Boulder Creek.

"We feel RedTree has been responsive to the Redevelopment Agency and to neighbors," Swift said. "But we are anxious to move forward."

People who live and own businesses nearby told supervisors

61495
they worry about the traffic the project would bring.

"It's a good thing to have retail development," said Randy McRee, who lives in the nearby Salisbury Drive area and commutes over Highway 17. "But it's also a good thing to have our homes and be able to get in and out."

Traffic has been major stumbling block in opening the area to larger developments.

Yet to be resolved is a proposed new access road to the shopping center with a new entrance to Dominican Hospital.

"Our concern has to do with patients and how they get to the hospital," said Stephanie Hauk of Dominican Hospital. Under a 1990 permit for their new emergency room, the hospital is required to move its main entrance road about 200 feet farther east along Soquel Drive, to line up with the road to the emergency room.

To line up with Dominican's new entrance road, the new shopping center road would go through the Adobe Animal Hospital, owned by veterinarian Chuck Kessinger.

After 24 years in practice, Kessinger told the supervisors Tuesday he's in no hurry to retire.