

Johnson elected mayor for busy year ahead

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By J.M. BROWN

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Randy Johnson, already a two-time mayor, was voted by colleagues Tuesday to once again serve as the City Council's symbolic leader during a year when a long-delayed development project he has championed and a controversial discount store are expected to claim center stage.

Besides weighing new plans for a revived Town Center project that Johnson and outgoing mayor Dene Bustichi have heavily promoted, the city is also certain to grapple with objections to an unrelated proposal to construct a 155,000-square-foot Target store on the south end of town.

Critics mounted another assault on the so-called big-box store and its proposed La Madrona Drive location during Tuesday's council meeting, saying the development would increase traffic, noise and

crime. Council members have declined to fully back the Target plan until environmental assessments are completed.

In the meantime, the new mayor says he will focus on pressing the Town Center project forward, with hopes that the council will OK an environmental impact report by the summer and have retail tenants in place within two years.

"I think it's going to be a busy year," said Johnson, a 55-year-old insurance agent and father of three who moved to Scotts Valley with wife Kathy in 1990.

Two weeks ago, the council OK'd an exclusive negotiating agreement with a new developer for the Town Center and Tuesday heard from a consultant who has pledged to breathe new life into the mixed-use project, which would essentially act as Scotts Valley's downtown. The plan calls for up to 125 new residential rental units over 150,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space.

Bustichi says having a new develop-

ment agreement that allows the council to approve a specific plan for the Town Center was the most important achievement during his year as mayor. He says the coming year provides the best chance yet for the city to get the project under way after 15 years of delays.

Among past roadblocks, the former developer backed out after failing to secure agreements last year from the various property owners of the Mount Hermon Road site, including two private families, the City of Santa Cruz and two propane companies. But Johnson and Bustichi say talks with owners seem to be back on track.

By choosing a new developer, Bustichi said, the council showed "We weren't going to let this project stagnate or get stalled again."

The city's consultant on the Town Center, RRM Design Group, has worked with popular apparel retailers like Banana Republic, Talbots and Coldwater Creek for other developments, including Emeryville's Bay

Street shopping plaza. But the consultant hasn't made any guarantees about which companies it may be able to recruit.

Council members say they hope the Town Center can attract stores that are not represented elsewhere in the county and won't drown out local business.

"We have an opportunity that never come to us before," said Bustichi, owner of a construction firm. "Finding a development that will not cannibalize existing business is important."

On Tuesday, the consultant showed images of low-scale buildings and pedestrian-friendly shopping paths that were popular with residents during recent workshops. Residents have suggested underground parking, outdoor dining, plenty of landscaping and energy-efficient fountains, which the consultants say they are considering.

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