

Meadow's fate will be discussed

Glenwood project faces opposition at hearing

By DAN WHITE
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SCOTTS VALLEY — The future of the city's last major undeveloped meadow will be discussed at a public hearing Thursday on the Glenwood project, which would put 156 homes on pasture land.

The Planning Commission hearing will begin at 6:30 p.m. Executives of Keenan Land Co. of Palo Alto, which put up the Cinema 9 theater in downtown Santa Cruz, insist their project will be attractive. It will have a much lower impact than the 276-home, 18-hole golf course project originally proposed for the site, they say, and 50 acres will remain open space.

But critics contend it will remove one of this suburban area's last remaining pieces of its long-lost rural days.

One of the most outspoken, Mayor Stephany Aguilar, said that 50-acre open space commitment doesn't mollify her.

"I am looking to see some dramatic changes in their design," said Aguilar. "Yes, they are dedicating open space, but none of that open space is buildable anyway, so it's not like they're doing us any favors."

She opposes the removal of hundreds of trees to make way for a multi-use path snaking through the property. The developers insist they are being responsive to Aguilar's request because they are now agreeing to take out 175 trees, not 350 as originally planned.

The developer, Chop Keenan, told Scotts Valley's council that his project would be a financial boon.

He angrily told a project critic last week that it's too late to block development from the project.

"This project will not go away," Keenan said. "It's not a matter of waving a magic wand and having it be a pasture and save the day. That's not how it works in America."

Keenan is no stranger to controversy. He was the original developer of a much-criticized blufftop condominium project north of Half Moon Bay. When the half-constructed building burned to the ground two years ago, local residents opened champagne bottles and printed commemorative T-shirts and greeting cards. The project was later re-



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Opponents to the plan have posted a sign at the meadow.

built.

Last week, Keenan devoted a large portion of his Scotts Valley study session outlining the Glenwood project's financial benefits.

"I'm throwing these numbers around like they're nickels and dimes," he told City Council after listing several examples. The project would bring an estimated \$35,000 in annual property taxes to the city, \$116,000 annually to the fire district and several other hefty perks, including financial benefits to the school and water districts.

Keenan faced scant opposition during that meeting. The only critic at last Thursday's sparsely attended Glenwood study session during a City Council meeting, was Jeff Ringold, a Santa Cruz resident who is a paid consultant for a group that opposes the project.

But the project is still the center of a highly contentious debate.

Some concerns spring from habitat and traffic impacts outlined in the environmental impact report, in a list of un-

avoidable significant impacts. One listed impact involves the Ohlone tiger beetle, which is subject of a request to place it on the endangered species list. The EIR states that trampling and pesticide run-off could have potential impact on this little-known creature, whose numbers are undocumented. The developers have set aside a tiger beetle "preserve" buffer near a planned extension of Siltanen Park.

According to the developers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wanted to keep the area open space but "could live with" the buffer area. Fish and Wildlife officials were unavailable for comment Monday.

Vice Mayor Randy Johnson said resident who have phoned him are split evenly between critics and supporters. He said he's weighing project benefits.

"Having said that, it's an extremely beautiful piece of property, and you want to preserve what you have up there."

He said he'd just received a "caustic, dismissive" phone call with someone accusing the city of trying to create another San Jose.

"It's an emotional issue," he said. "Every once in a while you get someone trying to take out their frustrations on a public servant," he said.

He also said he was surprised by the last meeting's relatively sparse attendance.

The meadow in question is part of the city's early history. It once included property owned by the brother of Hiram Scott, who was among the area's first 19th century settlers and the namesake of Scotts Valley. It been pasture land for generations.

Aside from the 156 single-family lots, the project would make room for 146 acres of parks and open space spread out across the 218-acre parcel, along with four miles of hiking, biking and horse trails.

Kerry Williams, project manager for the development company, said Keenan's putting aside 50 acres of open space in perpetuity shows a commitment to preserving Scotts Valley open space.

"This is the culmination of a long road," Williams said Thursday. "We think it's a beautiful signature project that Scotts Valley can be very proud of."

The project's proposal includes about 50 additional homes that would only go up if Scotts Valley's high school — which is being built on part of the property — fails to reach completion. Construction is well under way, however, and developers don't anticipate getting back the property.