

THE SENTINEL EDITORIALS

Delays And Excuses

A drive across the Soquel avenue bridge reminds us of the dismal flood aftermath six years ago. It also reminds us of the long six years the San Lorenzo Park redevelopment project has remained largely a paper program.

Weeds flourish where apartments, a courthouse and commercial buildings are planned to grow.

How many more crops are going to sprout and die back in ugly, dry stalks?

The year just past, in physical terms, was one in which site preparation on the westerly side of the river was completed, the functional River street extension was opened, and Joseph and Ted Alveraz completed a compact, but handsome, professional building at Soquel-Dakota.

On paper, claims have been staked for most of the 40 acres of saleable project land—but development of the major courthouse and shopping center features appears well beyond the horizon and the history of the Barrett Homes co-operative apartments proposal tempers any great expectations there.

In late November, the county courthouse deed exchange was recorded after more than two years of inter-governmental haggling. Yet, the county is not committed to start construction on the 10-acre Ocean-Water site before May 1, 1966.

Last week, the Shaffer and County Bank contracts covering all available land on the westerly side of the river were approved by the Santa Cruz redevelopment agency.

The bank is discussing development of a drive-in branch on its new parcel at Front-River point of the post office triangle during 1962.

The San Lorenzo Park Plaza development group represented by Keith Shaffer of Opal Cliffs hopes to construct new facilities for the Title Insurance company at River and Water streets this year. However, it will have five years to complete its \$1 million land purchase and another three years to develop the proposed \$4 million elevated shopping center on the 10-acre Soquel-Front-River block.

This brings us to the Barrett co-operative apartments, residential cornerstone of the redevelopment project.

The Barrett proposal for staged development of 247 apartment units of the 8.3-acre parcel flanking Dakota street west of Ocean street was the only fruit borne of the initial land sale effort in April, 1960.

Yet, the final contract was not signed until November 21—19 months later. Even now, no money has changed hands. This action waits on a firm FHA loan commitment for the first mortgage unit of 63 apartments.

Presumably, the Richmond firm will begin construction as soon as it has money on the line.

As noted earlier, history doesn't encourage us in this assumption. The Barrett program has been characterized by a series of deadline extensions. Generally, these have been laid to "unforeseeable circumstances" such as unstable subsoil; FHA recommendations that bedrooms in proposed tower apartments be enlarged and the necessity to amend the redevelopment plan to provide an acceptable parking ratio, increase building height limits, and set proper zoning.

We do not condone these delays, only try to understand them. However, in recent months even several agency members have wondered aloud—and we join them—if the developers are letting them hold the bag while the market ripens. This should become acutely apparent with the contract signed and the initiative entirely up to Barrett.

We earnestly urge the Barrett organization to employ some of the relentless ramrodding which has characterized the Shaffer program to date.

A sense of urgency must replace the

Barrett has not hesitated to start garden apartments in a carbon copy development in Richmond even though it is waiting on final engineering for the tower units there, too.

If there is any doubt about the market for co-operative apartments in Santa Cruz, there is, in the end, only one way to test it—build them. We feel the sales contract has adequate “escape clauses” in the event the project does not sell.

We also feel the community of Santa Cruz has a considerable investment in the redevelopment apartment area. But more important, it is due action commensurate with the optimism expressed in bidding for the land.

Barrett has promised to present target dates upon which the agency can depend and upon which the community can depend by mid-January.

We should like to see this in firm but realistic figures. And, we urge aggressive follow-up on bidding and whatever else it takes to get that FHA loan application assembled and processed.

We would like to cross that bridge some time this spring and see dust rising from a construction project.