

Capitola OKs more big stores

Capitola Mall
Three new centers
due on 41st Avenue

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CAPITOLA — Capitola's 41st Avenue will strengthen its hold on the county's commercial developments with the addition of three shopping centers, all south of Capitola Road.

All three gained approval of the city's Planning Commission Thursday night. The approvals will stand unless appealed to the City Council.

The centers will total nearly 100,000 square feet of retail space, encompassing 43,645, 29,332 and 23,336 square feet, respectively. By comparison, Capitola Mall is 381,098 square feet.

A 14,716-square-foot Outdoor World sporting goods store and a 14,435-square-foot Standard Brands paint store will serve as anchor tenants to two of the centers. The third and smallest center will actually be a remodel and expansion of an existing complex.

The unanimous approval by commissioners comes just two weeks before they'll get a look at long-discussed Capitola Mall expansion plans. Commissioners will have the expansion environmental impact report before them on July 1. The city hopes construction on the mall could begin as early as next summer.

That expansion would nearly double the size of the mall, with the addition of two major department stores. JC Penney will occupy one of the additional spaces. The mall is reportedly negotiating with Emporium-Capwell, among others, for the other spot.

Construction will start on the two largest new centers by September and open in April, applicant Don Starr told The Sentinel after the meeting. For the smaller remodel and expansion, a Christmas opening is planned, said applicant David Jones. The new approvals include:

- Begonia Plaza at 43,645 square feet will be the largest of the three centers, featuring the Standard Brands store. Located on a 3.4-acre parcel on 41st Avenue adjacent to the Spa Fitness Center. Shaffer's Tropical Gardens, which has been on the site since 1937, will be torn down to make room.

- Four-Star Center will be 29,332 square feet, featuring Outdoor World on the 2.3-acre parcel. It will be located just a block away from Begonia Plaza, also on the west side of 41st Avenue. The Capitola Suites office building and the Honda/Guitar Showcase shops are on either side.

- Wind 'N' Sea Plaza will total 23,336 square feet, however, only

41st Avenue stores

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about 9,000 square feet will be new. Located at 41st Avenue and Capitola Road, adjacent to and behind the Chevron gasoline station, it mostly has included a Quik Stop, Foster Freeze and Mountain Mike's Pizza. The Quik Stop will remain, but Foster Freeze will be torn down and Mountain Mike's remodeled for retail use.

Both Begonia Plaza and Four-Star Center will be similar in design, with three separate buildings apiece. The anchor stores will be in the rear. Two other buildings will flank either side of the parking lot nearest 41st Avenue.

Planning Commissioner Rick Karleen — although voting for the centers — maintained both "fly in the face of the (city's) 41st Avenue Design Guidelines." Those guidelines specifically call for buildings to be situated close to 41st Avenue, with parking to the rear.

"We've waste-papered the guidelines because the applicant wanted it to look this way," Karleen said. "The sites are big enough to meet the guidelines."

Commissioner Howard Dysle said he would normally agree with Karleen except for the fact the City Council met at a joint study session and agreed to the concept.

Applicant Starr said later, "There are 72 guidelines and we followed 71." He said that even though the parking lots are at the front of the centers, "we shielded the lots with mounds of plantings."

Starr added that he'll be contributing \$94,000 toward the city's 41st Avenue Street Improvement Fund for the two centers. A 10-foot-high masonry wall also will be built to the rear of the center to shield Tradewinds Mobile Home Park residents.

Karleen also expressed concern about the Begonia Plaza's 179-space parking lot not connecting to the adjacent Spa Fitness Center. He maintained the lot could help the overflow problem next door. The city approved the spa two years ago with only a 79-space parking lot, and spa customers have flooded the area looking for parking.

Commission Chairman Bill Fisher said that it was the city's mistake

that caused the parking problem and that Begonia Plaza should not be expected to solve it.

Karleen replied, "But McDonald's customers park in Long's. Those going to Lyon's are parking at County Bank."

Commissioners made no changes to the lot, leaving it separate from the spa. Starr said later, "We want to be good neighbors, but we don't feel we have to create parking for the spa."

Outdoor World owner Bob Thomas told The Sentinel afterward that no decision has yet been made concerning whether the present downtown Santa Cruz store will remain open. He said there remained a "strong possibility" he will have two stores operating in the area.

The Four-Star Center application, while tentatively approved, will return to commissioners on July 3 for final approval. Commissioners couldn't decide whether the rear of the buildings should have a smooth concrete block finish or a rough one. That decision will be made after details of proposed materials will be shown to commissioners.