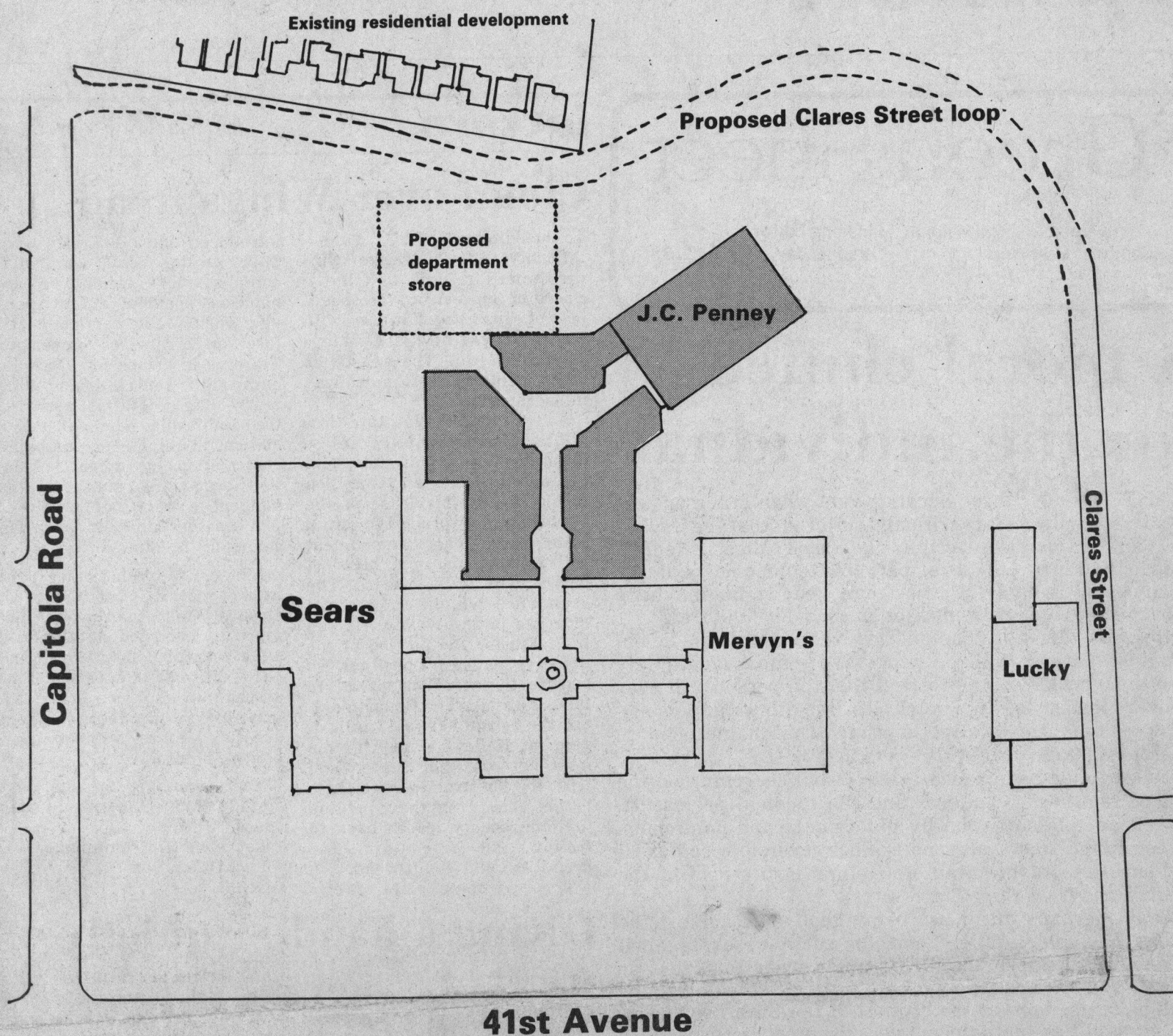


Mall expansion study approved



Environmental impact report of Capitola Mall expansion (shaded area) has been sent to the City Council.

Commission sends EIR to City Council

By KATHY SALAMON
STAFF WRITER

The Capitola Planning Commission has recommended City Council approval of the final environmental impact report of the Capitola Mall expansion, but some members expressed reservations about the document.

The proposed expansion would increase the retail space in the 41st Avenue and Capitola Road shopping center by 395,000 square feet — just about doubling its size.

The City Council will hold a public hearing on certification of the EIR Thursday, July 24 at 7 p.m.

Commissioner Bill Fisher, who voted against recommending the EIR, said many new questions had been raised at Thursday night's public hearing.

"I've received enough new information that I need more time to digest it all," he said. "I'm not ready to vote one way or the other."

In particular, Fisher questioned the findings of air quality standards which the study

said would not change significantly.

Commissioner John Elstad, who said he wanted time to prepare written comments to the City Council with the recommendation, said he was also dissatisfied with the EIR.

"I've talked to a lot of people in the surrounding neighborhoods," Elstad said. "I cannot see where this expansion and this EIR satisfy any of the true impacts with mitigations for traffic, air pollution, noise, and character of life."

Elstad said the company preparing the EIR, Earth Metrics Inc., "pooh-poohed" some of the findings of the impacts.

"Unless someone deals with the issue of traffic honestly," he said, "Capitola will become like a Santa Clara parking lot at all times."

Several votes on the recommendation taken by the commission were deadlocked in a 2-2 vote. (Commissioner Rick Karleen was absent from the meeting.)

Commissioners Norma Kriege and Howard Dysle said they found the EIR satisfactory.

Kriege said, "You can't stop

growth. The best thing we can do is try to control it. I think I can vote for certifying the EIR in that they named the problems that need to be addressed."

These opinions came after many residents questioned the findings of the EIR.

Bill Hall, a resident of Lotman Drive in Live Oak, said his street intersects with Capitola Road two blocks away from the proposed mall development. But the traffic study did not include any analysis for this intersection.

"I'm not opposed to the mall expansion," he said, "but I am opposed to such an expansion if Capitola does not look at impacts of residential areas if they are outside the city."

Pete Harkinson of the County Planning Department, also said the EIR failed to address issues outside the Capitola city limits.

"There is significant impact on Highway 1 which is not dealt with in the EIR," Harkinson said. "The consultant also said that Capitola Road can handle the increased traffic. But Capitola Road is four lanes near the

mall. It is only two lanes west of that."

Dysle countered that argument, though, saying that Capitola cannot wait for the county to make improvements on its roadways.

"It's no secret that the county has tried to stop growth by not improving the roads," he said. "I'm amazed that these people are even here today saying these things."

In the end, Elstad switched his vote, making for a 3-1 vote to recommend the City Council approve the EIR.

The Planning Commission requested that the City Council not look at certifying the EIR until its August meeting when written comments can be prepared.

However, Planning Director Susan Tupper said Monday that the City Council will go ahead with its scheduled public hearing Thursday.

"In view of the Planning Commission's recommendation, the council may decide to wait (until August)," Tupper said. "But they don't need the Planning Commission decision to act."