

Planners reject Live Oak project

Is it first step toward moratorium?

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The Santa Cruz County Planning Commission has taken the first step toward what may become a building moratorium in the Live Oak area.

Last Wednesday, the commission unanimously rejected an eight-unit subdivision on Capitola Road near 17th Avenue, for a variety of reasons including the finding that the new development would have an adverse impact on traffic and water supply in the area.

The project was one of the first to be evaluated under a new set of "Urban Services Evaluation Criteria," which rate the amount of traffic, sewage and runoff a project would generate, as well as its proximity to parks and existing sidewalks.

USEC was specifically designed for the Live Oak area, whose residents continue to complain of the effects of a building boom in the area. It came into being earlier this election year with the focus of the District 1 supervisorial race on Live Oak growth.

Hailed by incumbent Dan Forbus as long needed, his chief opponent, Jan Beautz, claims it only saw the light of day because of the election. She said she had been lobbying for USEC for five years, as a

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member of the Live Oak Community Association.

Now this new political football has prompted the planning commissioners to ask the Board of Supervisors to order a study on the cumulative effect of numerous small subdivisions in the Live Oak area.

"We have called for a moratorium. We do have a problem there, definitely," said Dale Skillicorn, the Watsonville-area commissioner also known for his opposition to the county's new growth rate of 1 percent, which he thinks is unrealistically low.

Live Oak-area Commissioner Teall Messer quibbled with the term "moratorium," however.

"Moratorium" is an unfortunate choice of words," Messer said. "What we want to know is where are we in terms of cumulative impact (of small subdivisions). We don't want to build more and more units and end up with gridlock."

Messer said the county needs an overall survey of how its

General Plan and zoning mesh with its capital improvement plan. For instance, the zoning may allow more units than an existing sewer line can accommodate. It is this sort of study the commissioners want the supervisors to initiate, he said.

"The General Plan should be based on the available infrastructure," Messer said. "The Planning Commission hasn't had the information to make that decision. The commission has had a tendency to knock off a few units (from a particular subdivision) and assume that took care of the problem."

Although he voted for what may become a building moratorium, Messer said he had supported the eight-unit project that inspired the requested study of cumulative impacts. He was unable to round up two more votes for its approval, however.

(The eight-unit project was also rejected because the houses were to be built almost flush with the front lot lines, and were larger than allowed under current zoning, Messer said, adding that these problems could have been resolved.)

Tomorrow, the Planning Commission will consider two adjacent subdivisions on Capitola Road near Chanticleer Avenue. One subdivision would create nine single-family lots and six townhouse units. The second would create 11 single-family units.

But USEC rankings for both show low marks in the traffic, sewage and drainage areas.

The traffic ranking for both (Level of Service E) is lower than that for the rejected eight-unit project. The sewage ranking can be improved if the county goes through with a proposed new sewer trunkline on Capitola Road. Some capital improvement projects are being held up, however, until the county finds out how much money it is actually getting from the state this year. That amount may not be known until September, after the state Legislature finishes patching up its budget.

But neither Messer nor Skillicorn was willing to predict whether these two projects would be rejected tomorrow. Skillicorn said the rejection of the eight-unit project last week was not necessarily trend-setting.

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