

Beach Area Plan cost at \$500,000

Beach Flats
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SANTA CRUZ — In two years the city has spent more than \$500,000 for consultants, lawyers and environmental impact reports on the controversial Beach Area Plan.

And the price is likely to rise, development officials say.

"I think it's been a fair cost so far, considering the size and scope of the project," said Eileen Fogarty, city director of planning.

By comparison, Fogarty said, EIR costs alone for the Terrace Point development on the city's western edge are approaching \$200,000. A three-year transportation study conducted by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission cost more than \$750,000 — and its conclusions were rejected.

Opponents of the plan, like the Beach Area Working Group, say the city is paying too much.

"It's ironic that so much taxpayer money is paying for this, while from what I can tell it's the taxpayers who are against it," said Doug Rand, a leader of the beach group.

Supporters and city officials say the cost is well worth it because it provides a blueprint to revitalizing a long-ignored area of the city, while limiting business development at and around the Boardwalk.

The estimated \$454,000 cost for the EIR and consultant reports are expected to increase as the project

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continues. And that doesn't include attorney fees for past two years, which Fogarty estimates at around \$50,000 so far.

Broken down, \$200,000 in costs is related to six consultant firms the city hired, including a historic preservationist, design consultant, and housing and neighborhood specialist. Those consultants have worked with the city's lone planner assigned to the project.

Another \$254,000 has been spent on putting together the plan's EIR, which includes EIR consultant costs.

The money provides a backdrop to the heated debate waged over the beach plan. If adopted, the plan would remove and replace some Beach Flats housing, realign Third Street, expand the Boardwalk, build a new conference hotel and scatter cafes and shops within the 205-acre area.

The plan will be the subject of a continued public hearing tonight at

7 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium. Almost 600 residents crammed into the auditorium Tuesday night to voice their concerns. It's expected that hundreds more will return tonight, because only about 45 of the 164 people who signed up to speak did so.

Mayor Celia Scott said she couldn't be sure if a third hearing will take place Oct. 6.

"It's really up to the council," Scott said. "But it would be my recommendation we continue the meeting to Oct. 6" because so many people want to speak.

People on both sides of the issue say the beach plan has elicited as much response and public input as any in recent memory.

"The first major public hearing I attended was in the '70s for Light-house Field and another I remember was about a proposal to run a freeway through the city," said the mayor, a resident of Santa Cruz since 1969. "Those brought out a lot of interest, as well as this plan."

City Manager Richard Wilson,

hired in 1981, said he can recall a few issues that drew as much community interest within the past 10 years, including the proposal to build a Longs Drug Store on Mission Street, the downtown revitalization plan, and a proposal to create an assessment district to purchase greenbelt property.

Opponents say the Beach Area Plan would bring more traffic and environmental impacts and needlessly displace some Beach Flats homeowners. But a key component of the plan ensures that each and every project proposed within the plan go through its own planning approvals, backers say.

"We've seen some piecemeal development already there where businesses provide little public benefits," Fogarty said. "This plan changes that and forces business to provide some public benefits like shuttle buses and parks before any development can come forward."

And without the plan, businesses can expand anyway under the current general plan, Fogarty said.