

Aptos Village Plan gets applause from residents

SANTA CRUZ — Kudos went out to county planners Wednesday for their work on revising the Aptos Village Plan.

Aptos residents told county planning commissioners they were more than satisfied with the latest recommendations in the land-use report.

"We heartily support 99 percent of the recommendations," said Joe Cook, a member of Aptos Neighbors Association. The only change he suggested was to retain a commercial and residential mix in the village core.

The staff report was so well received that a member of the Live Oak Community Association asked commissioners to order a similar land-use report for Live Oak.

The document suggests a number of sweeping land-use changes for the Aptos village, including cutting the housing densities in half, lowering the zoning on the controversial La Mirada property, updating the commercial zoning and restricting new businesses to small-scale enterprises.

The Board of Supervisors had recommended the village plan be revised.

As staff planner John Warren pointed out, many of the changes reflect existing conditions. For example, he said, most of the homes are built on large parcels of land, which could have accommodated more houses under the previous zoning. Since it's unlikely new homes will be crammed into the parcels, the zoning was changed to reflect a lower density.

Also, the proposed land-use plan takes a closer look at the topography, recent flood-plain maps and the changes in the definitions of some commercial areas that were adopted in 1982.

The plan will get another public review at an evening hearing at 7:30 May 1 at the Board of Supervisors chamber before the Planning Commission will forward its recommendations to the board.

The staff had held a number of meetings with residents before the final report was written. The controversial items were revamped to meet neighborhood concerns.

The primary issues raised by the public centered on a desire to protect existing neighborhoods and the semi-rural character of Aptos village.

In that vein, area residents had objected to a medium density on the 3½-acre La Mirada property.

Davidson, Cavanaugh and Brezzo of San Jose have proposed building a 35-unit senior-affordable housing project and 15 market-value townhouses on the site.

Neighbors want a smaller development.

Several commissioners said they didn't want to down-zone the property, especially if there was a chance to get affordable housing there.

"My objection to it is that 90 percent of the complaints came from people who live next to it ... who wouldn't have been allowed to build their own homes under today's standards," said Live Oak Commissioner Skip Eberly.

Planner Warren replied, "It was our original recommendation it remain urban medium. But there was considerable neighborhood opposition to that."

Another planner suggested a compromise that would allow higher density if the low-income project is built, or lower zoning if a market-value development is built.

Commissioners will consider that at their May 1 meeting.

The other chief concern of residents were the zoning changes for the commercial area.

Staff has suggested prohibiting large commercial enterprises, such as auto sales, lumber yards, or limiting tourist-related businesses, such as gift shops and adult bookstores.

The thrust is to limit commercial uses to "those which reinforce a sense of community in the village..." the report said.