

# Live Oak residents frustrated

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The frustration was clear in Live Oak last Thursday night when residents met with county transportation experts to talk about traffic.

"We are the dumping ground of the county for low-income housing," one man said.

Other residents agreed. Concerned that development has been growing faster than services such as road improvements, they called for a moratorium on growth until services can catch up.

"In a sense, let's catch our breath with these services," Dave Laughlin said residents told him.

Laughlin is chief of the Planning Department's Community Development Division. Aided by maps, he and other planners took turns describing their ideas for improving Live Oak streets; then they and about 70 residents who showed up for the workshop split into groups to discuss those ideas.

The preliminary plan for street improvements is based on an assumed 2 percent growth rate calculated to the year 2000, Associate Transportation Planner Martin Carver said. That means traffic will increase by about 33 percent, a figure arrived at by calculating both Live Oak traffic and traffic from surrounding areas.

Planners studied both existing and future traffic to evaluate problem areas and come up with solutions. However, putting those proposals into action will be difficult because money is short, Carver said.

"The financial picture, is very bleak and that's really the bottom line," he said after the meeting.

Some possibilities for funding, he told residents, are Federal Emergency Management Agency monies, Federal Aid Urban funds earmarked for street improvements, and state highway monies. However, federal funds might dry up in the efforts to balance the national budget.

Other possibilities are developers' fees — Live Oak's transportation fund now totals \$112,581, Carver said — and assessing residents by forming a county service area.

Carver estimated about 3,600 housing units will be added to the existing 8,000 in Live Oak by the year 2000. Disadvantages to a developers' fee — raised just last summer from about \$50 per unit to \$1,800 — stem from the nature of the fee.

"The drawback is that it hinges on new development,"

Carver said. "New development has to come in."

The sentiment expressed by residents was that more development has meant, in the past, more low-income housing and more strain on the area's infrastructure.

They should not have to shoulder the burden of Live Oak's traffic problems themselves, some residents said, because they were caused by the county's push for low-income housing.

"Has the county thought of setting up a county service area that would tax people who are not having all this mess put in their backyard?" one resident asked.

His question drew applause from the audience, but the response was that a decision such as levying a fee on all county residents is up to the Board of Supervisors.

The list of proposed improvements includes street widening, signals, stop signs, sidewalks and bike lanes.

New signal lights are proposed for Soquel and 17th avenues, Eaton Street and Seventh Avenue, Seventh Avenue and Brommer Street, East Cliff Drive and 17th Avenue, and Portola Drive and 41st Avenue.

To decide which intersections need improvement, the transportation staff calculated such things as accident rates. For example, the Capitola Road-17th Avenue intersection has an accident rate of 1.44 accidents per million vehicles; that's more than double the county average of .69.

The intersections were also rated on the level of service now provided, with "A" being the highest level and "F" the lowest. Portola Drive-17th Avenue was rated the lowest, with an "E/F" rating and a 1.05 accident rate.

Though the transportation staff plan calls for improvements at that intersection, they would be done only after that corner is properly aligned, which means the county might have to buy a motel located on one of the corners.

Residents called that corner "the most dangerous intersection in Live Oak" and insisted that it needs to be improved as soon as possible.

"Something needs to be done now," said resident Carolyn Bartz, a member of the Live Oak Community Assn. "It's going to be years before the county can afford to buy that motel."

Streets tagged by the transportation staff for widening from two lanes to four lanes include Capitola Road from Seventh to 30th Avenue, Seventh Avenue from Capitola Road to East Cliff Drive and a portion of 17th Avenue.

Three-lane streets, to improve traffic flow and provide left-turn pockets at intersections, include 17th Avenue from Capitola Road to East Cliff Drive, and East Cliff Drive from 17th to 13th Avenue.

Intersections given a high priority for improvement by residents include 17th Avenue and East Cliff Drive, Seventh Avenue and Eaton Street, and Soquel and 17th avenues.

"The major concern is safety," said Rob Bremmer, a resident and Live Oak Community Assn. member.

The county's plan also calls for bike lanes on portions of

Brommer Street, Portola Drive, and Soquel and 17th avenues.

Residents expressed concern that there were not enough proposed improvement around the area's schools, such as on 17th Avenue near Green Acres.

"Children's safety was a very high priority," Carver said after leading a discussion group of residents, "from sidewalks to slowing down traffic on the streets."

Streets used by schoolchildren were given the highest priority by the transportation staff for sidewalks. The plan calls for 4-foot concrete sidewalks in residential areas and 6-foot sidewalks in commercial areas.

Second priority was given to major streets connecting to commercial areas, and third and lowest priority, to all other major streets.

Transportation Planning Supervisor Linda Wilshusen told residents the next step is for the transportation staff to take the information gathered last night and prepare a summary. It is then expected to take a month to come up with a revised traffic plan.

The Transportation Commission will hold a public hearing on the plan March 6.

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